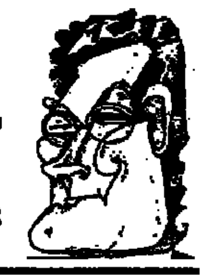
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Farouk Hosni, portrait of the week by Bahgory 8

Rebel advance

THE KHARTOUM government is increasing its military and air presence in the strategic southeastern town of Damazin in preparation for a possible attack by rebel forces, travellers returning from the area said yesterday.

Rebels fighting the Sudanese army are advancing on Damazin, about 480km southeast of the capital, with the aim of putting pressure on the Khartoum government and sparking a popular uprising. Damazin has a hydroelectricity plant which supplies Khartoum with 80 per cent of its power. On Tuesday, rebel leader Colonel John Garang said southern and northern opposition forces were about 60km south of the town.

As former Sudanese Prime Minister Sadiq Al-Mahdi urged the armed forces and police to rise up and overthrow the Khartoum government, the rebels claimed to have killed 1,260 government soldiers during four days of fighting.

Right time

PALESTINIAN leader Yasser Arafat stated in Cairo yesterday that the creation of a Palestinian state will be declared at the right time — the end of the interim period, and brushed aside Israeli comments to the contrary. Following talks with President Mubarak and Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid yesterday, Arafat said that the Palestinian state was a Palestinian, international and Arab decision, not an Israeli one.

Arafat briefed President Mubarak on the Hebron agreement and future Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. His statements came shortly after Israel said it would take harsh action if the Palestinians unilaterally declare an independent state.

AIG carnage

TWO car bombs exploded in Algeria yesterday in the centre of Blida, south of Algiers, killing three people and wounding at least 20 others. The country is already reeling from a wave of car bombs that pushed the death toll caused by Islamist extremist violence since the start of the month of Ramadan to more than 150, with no end in sight.

One day earlier, two car bombs in Algiers killed 18, wounded 40 and caused major damage to a cultural centre and cars in a parking lot. Two other bombs were defused near a sports stadium and the Clos-Salembier district.

The week has witnessed the worst incident of violence when 48 men, women and children had their throats slit in a village south of Algiers. The attacks are attributed to the Armed Islamic Group, the most radical of the nation's Islamic fundamentalist groups.

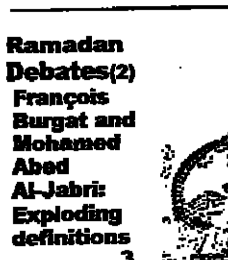
Yeltsin visit

RUSSIAN President Boris Yeltsin made a surprise visit to the Kremlin yesterday. He held talks with Russian Premier Viktor Chernomyrdin — the first since Yeltsin was hospitalised on 8 January.

The Kremlin talks focused on the forthcoming meeting between Chernomyrdin and US Vice-President Al Gore, the 27 January elections in Chechnya and a summit meeting of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) later this month.

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INSIDE





INFUSED WITH TRADITION: In Upper Egypt the hibiscus flower is harvested, dried and then sorted, ready to be sold as *karkade*, the ruby coloured drink that is a popular Ramadan standby

photo: Randa Shaath

Plan for final status

Alliance with Egypt and Jordan looks like Arafat's plan in the coming crucial phase, writes **Tarek Hassan** from Gaza

Cairo continues to be a major focal point in Yasser Arafat's on-going battle to ensure Israeli withdrawal from the remainder of the West Bank. This lends special importance to his meeting yesterday with President Hosni Mubarak.

Continued Egyptian-Jordanian support appears to be vital for Arafat at this juncture. Palestinian-Israeli negotiations are inching toward a crucial phase that will determine the tenor of their future bilateral relations. Arafat believes that the continuation of the diplomatic initiative spearheaded by Cairo in coordination with Jordan, which led to the signing of the Hebron agreement, could serve as a mainstay for further political gains. The continuation of this initiative will also make it practically impossible for Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to use inter-Arab divisions to his advantage.

Arafat is convinced that the "negotiation battles" of the future will be even tougher than previous rounds. Hence the need for close policy coordination between the Palestinians, Egypt and Jordan, combined with a distribution of responsibilities amongst the three parties in international and regional circles that have an influence over Israel.

It is expected that the three Arab parties will insist that Israel should not unilaterally define the areas of its expected withdrawal. The three-phase redeployment should begin on 28 February and be completed by 15 June 1998. A letter from Palestinian negotiator Saeb Ereikat to America's peace envoy Dennis Ross, the text of which was obtained by *Al-Ahram Weekly*, sheds further light on the Palestinian position on the redeployment.

The one-page letter reads: "Mr Ross. In pursuance of our discussion of the letter addressed by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher to Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, which deals with defining the Israeli military positions during the phases of redeployment and which may be construed to mean that Israel alone will make these definitions, we hereby state our formal position as follows: In order to avoid any future misunderstandings, Chairman Arafat would like to draw your attention to Article 11 paragraph 2-F of the provisional agreement which states that the military areas will be defined in the course of the three phases of redeployment. We would like to stress that this letter should constitute a part of your understanding of our position which is based on the provisional agreement and which means that the two sides, and not Israel alone, will define the military areas."

The Palestinians are hopeful that the Israeli redeployment, once completed, will result in restoring 93 per cent of the West Bank to Palestinian control. Israel, however, is reported to be only prepared to hand back to the Palestinians a meagre 40 per cent of the West Bank's total area.

The Palestinians already are in control of about 30 per cent of the West Bank following the Israeli withdrawal from the major cities, leaving the future of 70 per cent of the total area to be determined in the three phases of future redeployment.

Israel is expected to delay the determination of the status of this vast area for as long as possible to keep the issue on the agenda of the final status negotiations. If it manages to achieve this, it will be in a position to determine the Palestinians' future for some time to come.

Viewed in this light, Arafat's visit to Cairo yesterday differed from previous visits in that it signalled the start of the "negotiation battle" between the Arabs and Israel on the final status of the Palestinian territories.

(see p.4)

Stranded Palestinians shun invitation

LIBYAN plans for a celebration to publicise the return of about 250 Palestinians stranded along the border with Egypt for the past 16 months turned sour when residents of the "Camp of Return" refused to leave and threatened Libyan visitors with knives, sticks and pieces of metal, reports **Khaled Dawoud** from the Egyptian-Libyan border camp.

The camp residents were among 30,000 Palestinians expelled by Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in August 1995. Gaddafi claimed his move was intended to expose the shortcomings of Palestinian-Israeli peace agreements, which did not guarantee the creation of a Palestinian state or the right of return of refugees to their homes.

The majority of those expelled managed to find shelter in other countries, but around 250 people had nowhere to go and were forced to live in miserable conditions in a camp along the desert border, despite the fact that many of them carried Egyptian documents which had been issued to Palestinians forced to leave the Gaza Strip following the 1967 War.

At the onset of the crisis, the Libyan authorities provided the camp residents with supplies and vowed that they would be allowed to stay until they got permission to return to their homes in Palestine. But after a while the camp became a headache for Libya, which was criticised for using the suffering of human beings for political objectives. Egypt, the Arab League and other concerned parties appealed to Gaddafi to reverse his decision. In the meantime, there was a sharp drop in Libyan aid to the camp residents, who now depend mainly on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian groups, such as the Belgian-based Medicins Sans Frontières.

Then, in a surprise move last week, the Libyan authorities issued a statement "inviting" the stranded Palestinians to return to Libya because "it has become clear that conditions were not appropriate for their return to their land due to the restrictions imposed by the Zionist enemy." A few days later, the Libyan Embassy in Cairo sent letters to local and international news organisations asking them to send representatives to witness the return of the Palestinians to Libya on Tuesday.

But when the reporters arrived at the camp, there were no signs that its residents were ready to move. Many of them said they could not return to Libya because they had no homes or jobs there. "We have not been stranded here for 16 months in order to return to Libya. Our home is Palestine," said Adel Luqa, a Palestinian teacher. "Returning to Libya would be like death. The few Palestinians still living there are barely surviving in bad economic conditions."

After hours of waiting, reporters saw buses carrying some Libyan officials and nearly 100 Palestinians arrive at the camp "to convince the Palestinians to return to Libya," as one Libyan official put it.

But the camp residents had a special reception in store for their unwelcome visitors. They brandished sticks, knives and pieces of metal and cursed their Palestinian compatriots who accompanied the Libyans, accusing them of being agents and traitors. "Our home is Palestine," the residents shouted.

Shortly afterwards, the residents began pelting their visitors with stones, forcing them to beat a hasty retreat out of the camp and back into Libya.

A solution to the problem does not appear to be in sight.

Begging to differ

In a lively debate at the Book Fair, Amr Moussa spoke about the prospects for peace in the region and Egypt's vision of the future. **Nevine Khalil** attended



photo: Amr Gamal

Discussions were heated as doctrines clashed on the fourth day of the 29th Cairo Book Fair, during a seminar entitled "Peace Efforts and the Future of the Region".

With Foreign Minister Amr Moussa as guest speaker, the discussion panel comprised four prominent writers and thinkers from across the political spectrum, including Makram Mohamed Ahmed, editor-in-chief of the weekly magazine *Al-Mussawar*, *Al-Ahram* writers Lutfi El-Kholi and Anis Mansour and playwright Saadeddin Wahba.

During the discussions, Moussa emphasised that the establishment of a Palestinian state, "in the real sense of the word", is the ultimate aim of the peace process. Egypt's policy in the Middle East, he said, aims to create a just peace according to the land-for-peace formula, which will ensure the rights of the Palestinians and will be crowned by the creation of a Palestinian state. "These principles will not alter until the peace process is completed," he said.

Egypt's regional role was not dictated by fate, Moussa stressed, adding that it requires a great effort "to continue being a role model and pioneer." Egypt's regional role is not confined to the Middle East, but extends to Africa, the Mediterranean and Asia.

Moussa said that the Middle East is often subject to machinations from various parties, and "absolute awareness by everyone" is needed to confront them. He stressed that the peoples of the region must aim for a comprehensive peace and the removal of all weapons of mass destruction, and must take a full part in deciding their own future. "The creation of axes and alliances in the Middle East will only lead us back to point zero," he added.

While Moussa wanted to convey "a message of optimism", columnist Anis Mansour described the current picture as too "foggy", because the future course of the peace process is as yet unclear. He described public opinion in Egypt as "too divided" and argued that writers should coordinate their discourse.

Moussa disagreed, saying that the "orchestration of public opinion is not right, and a diversity of opinions is needed." He did, however, second the opinion that the future of the peace process is unclear and that there is a "great possibility that we may face some very critical and serious problems in the future."

A discontented Wahba argued that Moussa should be "realistic, not optimistic, because the peace negotiations will not lead to peace but surrender." He claimed that Israel had been the only beneficiary of the peace process so far, because it had allowed it to break out of its isolation, and had removed the threat of war with its Arab neighbours. Moussa countered that negotiations "are not a surrender, because they are the only procedure for claiming our rights legitimised by the present-day world." He continued that the word 'surrender', like the word 'war' should be erased from Arab rhetoric. "We resist Israeli ambitions by convincing world powers of our views," said Moussa, adding that if Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian parliament accepted the peace accords with Israel, then "we support their choices."

With its lack of material and natural resources, El-Kholi questioned Egypt's ability to lead the region, especially in the face of competition from three aspiring non-Arab nations — Iran, Turkey and Israel. Moussa admitted that Egypt's resources fall short of its aspirations, but argued that "this propels us to double our efforts and use what we have to the optimum." Egypt's determination to institute domestic reform is an asset when it comes to its influence abroad, he added.

Moussa continued that cooperation and not confrontation was the way to deal with those non-Arab states competing for status in the region.

Answering another question from El-Kholi about how Egypt would manage the anticipated confrontation between the West and the rest of the world, Moussa said that Egypt was "not responsible for halting Western hegemony or leading the non-West against it." If Egypt puts itself forward to lead the non-West, it would be *making* the same mistake as the West, by attempting to impose its own culture on others.

Makram Mohamed Ahmed noted that world diplomacy has become more economically-oriented, and that Egypt should follow this trend. Moussa agreed, saying that "all ambassadors and consuls are instructed to give priority to development and economic issues, to assist both the public and private sectors."

The world is currently experiencing vast upheavals, Moussa said. He advised the Arabs to interact with the modern world and its developments, but at the same time to "hold on to our identity". "Keeping our Egyptian or Arab identity is essential to give us strength to deal with these sweeping international changes," he said, adding that there should be no fear of interaction. "We cannot and will not be allowed to live in isolation," he stressed.

Wahba, however, sees evidence of a Western cultural invasion and the erosion of Egyptian identity in the fact that traditional food like *fuul* is being replaced by American-style fast food like McDonalds. He went so far as to assert that "Arab integrity no longer exists".

Moussa strongly objected to what he saw as Wahba's simplification of issues, countering that *fuul* could not be considered a measure of cultural identity. He further added that while Arab unity is not steady, it "is progressing slowly and is stronger than it was two years ago".

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OPENING THE FAIR. President Hosni Mubarak met with writers and intellectuals for a discussion of the regional and domestic situations after inaugurating the Cairo Book Fair on Saturday.

Responding to the audience's questions, the president denied that Ethiopia and Eritrea were involved in the fighting in Sudan, which he described as an internal Sudanese problem. He also expressed surprise that while the vice-president of Sudan was in Cairo to enlist its support, Hassan El-Turabi, speaker of the Sudanese parliament, was meanwhile launching verbal attacks against Egypt. As a result, Mubarak said he sent a strongly-worded message to the Khartoum government.

Mubarak stressed that Egypt has a pivotal role to play in the Middle East peace process. The Palestinians and Israelis still have a long way to go, he said, describing their negotiations as "difficult and complicated." The Hebron deal "is only a step and other major steps remain to be taken." Mubarak added that restoration of the Golan Heights to Syria is a precondition for realising a comprehensive peace in the region.

It was unlikely, he said, that President Hafez Al-Assad would agree to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu "in the present circumstances," following Israeli declarations ruling out withdrawal from the Golan.

Globalisation at the fair

Globalisation is for everyone, according to presidential adviser Osama El-Baz. **Nevine Khalil** attended a seminar on world trends at the Cairo Book Fair

Will globalisation enable the Third World to close the yawning economic gap separating it from the developed nations? And is the loss of specific cultural identity, particularly non-Western identity, an inevitable part of the globalisation process?

According to Osama El-Baz, President Hosni Mubarak's chief political adviser, globalisation is a dynamic process in which all peoples can take part. Addressing a crowd of around 400 at a seminar entitled "Globalisation and the Future of the World", on the third day of the 29th Annual Cairo Book Fair, El-Baz was joined by former minister of planning and renowned economist Ismail Sabri Abdallah, former director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, El-Sayed Yassin, and Adel Hamouda, deputy editor-in-chief of the weekly magazine *Rose El-Youssef*.

During the seminar, which lasted for over two and a half hours, globalism was defined as a worldwide trend towards a universal economic, political, social and cultural system, and a unified value structure.

El-Baz told the seminar that it had been widely assumed that globalisation would take place along the Western model, but that this was not necessarily the case. "I believe it would be a mistake of grave proportions to assume that the entire world is going to Westernise. We can globalise by establishing greater contacts with the systems which are applied in various parts of the world, without following the western model."

El-Baz told the seminar that globalisation was an ongoing social phenomenon, and so its final form could not yet be discerned. "It will be the product of the accumulation [of knowledge] and of interaction between different cultures," he said. There are many cultures which could not be neglected, he added, such as those of China, the Arab and Islamic worlds, and India.

He refuted the notion of a global 'Zionist conspiracy' monopolised by a handful of people, manipulating world events. "The moment we believe the world is managed according to a conspiracy, we will surrender to our fate and wait to be manipulated," he said. "This is very wrong."

In its attempt to keep pace with global trends, Egypt has worked hard at improving its infrastructure, implementing an overall programme for economic adjustment and reform, El-Baz said. It was, he added, "time to begin a new era, a revival," marked by increased economic development in various fields, and incorporating a cultural revival brought about by improved education and educational resources systems.

"Unless we increase our ability to master knowledge and increase our reservoir of knowledge we will miss the train of development," El-Baz emphasised. "The trick is to amass as much knowledge as we can through human resources." He added that the scale by which a country's wealth is measured is no longer its economic resources, but the amount of knowledge it possesses.

Hammouda, however, does not believe that Egypt is edging any closer towards following global trends, largely because of the continued central role of the government in various areas. He described the government's refusal to privatise the media as narrow-minded and contrary to global trends, and maintained that access to information and knowledge remained limited and under government control. He was also critical of the domestic political scene, saying that multi-party government remained an illusion, and that Egyptian human rights organisations still did not have legal status, which is out of line with world trends.

In response, El-Baz predicted "real development in the economic, political, social and cultural arenas in the coming years," emphasising that progress must be concurrent in all fields, and that developments in one field could not be made at the expense of other areas.

Panellists agreed that the contemporary phenomenon of globalisation was first recognised in the economic field, because of the growth of multinational and transnational corporations. According to Abdallah, the power of these transnational corporations now supercedes that of some national governments. He gave a detailed account of how these corporations had supplanted the role of governments, leaving them responsible for little more than guarding their national borders. Abdallah predicted that in its future dealings with aid-receiving nations, the world would be dealing with transnationals rather than governments. "Partnerships are the future, not government aid," he said. He also stressed the importance of future population levels because large populations will present both large markets and large pools of labour.

Citing problems in central Africa as an example, Yassin suggested that there is a worldwide crisis in national government. Hence, he maintained, it is values and cultures which should influence globalisation, rather than governments. If, however, the adoption of values like human rights became a global trend, he argued that there would have to be some regulation to prevent these rights being used as an excuse for foreign intervention in countries like Iraq and Libya.

Chronicling the 1973 War

DOCUMENTATION of the events surrounding the October 1973 War has been completed, the culmination of work by a special committee that has continued for over 20 years. But Maj. Gen. Samir Farag, chief of the Armed Forces Morale Department, in a statement to **Galal Nassar**, said the time was not yet right to publish the huge amount of information that had been gathered.

The committee, Farag said, had accomplished its task "with accuracy, impartiality and neutrality," beginning its work immediately after the war ended and finishing only a few days ago. All those who fought in the war, whether commanders, officers or soldiers, were invited to write down their memories. These were then classified according to the officer or soldier's corps and the areas in which he had served. The memories of some ex-servicemen were captured on video camera. Their versions of events were compared to the orders that had been issued by Military Operations, Farag said. Individual acts of heroism which were witnessed by more than one person were also documented.

Maps and battle plans, and an inventory of all weapons, equipment and troops which took part and their deployment along the war front, are also recorded, Farag said.

Asked when this staggeringly large amount of information would be published, Farag replied: "The armed forces cannot publish this information in view of the situation in the region... We still have enemies and the peace process has not been completed. Moreover, many of the weapons which were used in the war are still in service. To publish details of battle would disclose their capabilities, which could compromise the safety of the armed forces. Moreover, to disclose now the roles played by certain individuals, groups and states would harm Egypt's national interest."

State secrets are usually released after a period of 25 to 30 years, "but this matter is not subject to laws or the usual criteria," Farag said. The material would only be released if there was a change of circumstances which meant that the information no longer posed a danger to the national interest.

The documentation of the war, Farag said, would be of great assistance in the making of a new film, which depicts Egyptian troops storming across the Suez Canal to liberate the Sinai Desert. He added that the highly respected scriptwriter Osama Anwar Okasha has been commissioned to write the screenplay of the film, which will be directed by Sherif Arafa. A committee of commanders, historians and military correspondents was established under Field Marshal Mohamed Ali Fahmi to supervise the writing of the scenario and the production of the film, and Defence Minister Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi issued orders that all resources be made available to ensure the film's success.

Bar at the crossroads

Following the demise of its chairman, the Bar Association seems to be facing a crossroads. **Dina Ezzat** reports on what the future may have in store

Following a court order ending the year-long sequestration of the Bar Association, lawyers are hoping that their syndicate will soon re-assert its independence and that elections will be held for a new Association council. However, members continue to be divided by political differences, particularly following the death of Ahmed El-Khawaga who, for almost three decades, led the Bar Association through internal upheavals and external confrontations.

"This is a very critical and sensitive moment in the history of the Association," commented prominent lawyer Nabil El-Hilali.

Four weeks ago, an administrative court ordered the lifting of the sequestration which had been imposed on the Association by another court at the beginning of 1996. The original sequestration order had been made at the request of a group of non-Islamist lawyers who claimed that the Islamist members of the Association's council had committed serious financial irregularities. But many lawyers opposed sequestration, fearing that it was a step towards subjecting their syndicate to government control.

Adding to the lawyers' frustration was the failure of the appointed committee of custodians to turn up hard evidence proving the alleged financial irregularities, or to organise syndicate elections on schedule last September.

The court order lifting the sequestration has yet to be implemented. As a result, a group of about 40 leading lawyers met a few days ago to consider ways of breaking the deadlock. "We simply decided that if the court order is not enforced within the coming week or two, we are going to call for an emergency General Assembly to enlist the full support of all lawyers to end this mess," said an Islamist lawyer, who asked that his name be withheld. "This is not just about Islamists. All the political forces in the syndicate are determined to see this sequestration farce brought to an end."

Members of the dissolved council, as well as many rank-and-file lawyers, are in agreement that a confrontation with the government should be avoided. "We do hope that the government is going to be sensible about this matter," said Islamist Moukhtar Nouh, treasurer of the suspended council. "Nobody wants a confrontation, but nobody would agree to leave things as they are."

El-Hilali hopes the court order will spare both lawyers and government an unwanted tug-of-war. "Legally speaking, this court order has to be enforced. To ignore it is to commit a misdemeanour," he said. It is, he believes, only a matter of time, and possible legal wrangling, before the order is implemented.

Although lawyers appear to be united as far as their battle to win back their syndicate's independence is concerned, they nevertheless continue to be divided by political differences. The Islamists, who won an overwhelming victory in the September 1992 elections, make up one camp, which is opposed by other political factions, who blame their bad performance in the elections on their lack of organisational skills.

"The nationalist forces will certainly not allow a re-play of the 1992 elections scenario," stated Nasserist Tahani El-Gebali, a member of the dissolved council. She believes that the "nationalist" forces learned the lesson the hard way. "We saw for ourselves that our lack of coordination led the council and, consequently, the will of the syndicate to fall prey to the Islamists who deprived this syndicate of its historic liberal character and turned it into a body affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood," El-Gebali said.

Many non-Islamists welcome the idea of including "liberal Islamists" in a strong coalition capable of breaking out of the vicious circle. "We have to admit that the Islamist trend is there and that it has every right to be represented in the future council, but council members should be there in their capacity as lawyers and not as representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood," stated Abdel-Aziz Mohamed, chairman of the Association's Cairo chapter.

A member of the liberal Wafd Party, Mohamed said this principle should not be applied to the Islamists alone, insisting that: "Everybody should drop their political affiliations before entering the union."

The Islamists deny that they are at war with the other political forces, but are obviously keen to keep a comfortable majority in the new council. Others believe that the time is not yet right to discuss the balance of power likely to emerge from any new elections. "Our attention should be focused on ending sequestration and re-asserting the independent will of lawyers," asserted Esmat El-Hawwari.

It is difficult to predict what may happen in the elections — if and when they are held. "There is not a single group that is really united," El-Hilali pointed out.

Underlining the level of internal differences is the fact that nearly 20 candidates are planning to contest the vacant post of Bar Association chairman. They include eight Wafdists, four leftists, several supporters of the ruling National Democratic Party and independents. "This does not augur well," El-Hilali noted.

The general consensus is that Ahmed El-Khawaga — the man who managed to strike a balance between the various political forces and still carry favour with the state — will sorely be missed.

Deals of the century

In what is probably the biggest financial scandal of the 1990s, four members of parliament and a large number of businessmen and bankers will be tried for alleged financial malpractices involving millions of pounds. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

Following an investigation that dragged on for a year and a half, Prosecutor-General Ragaa El-Arabi decided last week to put four members of parliament, 15 businessmen and 13 bankers on trial before the Supreme State Security Court for alleged financial irregularities involving more than LE1 billion.

According to the 419-page investigation report, bankers from the Nile Bank, the Commercial Bank of Daqahliya, El-Mohandes Bank, Suez Canal Bank and Faisal Islamic Bank, provided the MPs and the businessmen with loans and credit facilities exceeding LE1 billion without adequate collateral. No record of these loans was made in the banks' books.

The businessmen and MPs are accused of using forged documents to obtain the loans. Along with the bankers, they are also charged with misappropriating the funds of a number of banks in violation of banking laws and regulations laid down by the Central Bank of Egypt.

El-Arabi said that although LE402 million has been refunded by some of the businessmen in settlement of their debts, the charges against them will not be dropped.

The four MPs were named as: Tewfiq Abduh Ismail, a deputy for Dekerness in Daqahliya Governorate and chairman of the Assembly's Planning and Budget Committee; Mahmoud Azzam, a businessman and deputy for Al-Saff in Giza Governorate; Khaled Hamed Mahmoud, a deputy for Rahmaniya in Beheira Governorate; and Ibrahim Aglan, deputy for Edko, also in Beheira Governorate.

According to the bill of indictment, Aleya El-Ayyouti, vice-president of the Nile Bank, and her father, Eissa El-Ayyouti, the bank's president, along with two members of the board, used their positions to provide Mahmoud Azzam, chairman of El-Khaldiya Contracting and Land Reclamation Company and El-Mohamadiya Export and Import Company, and Khaled Mahmoud, chairman of the Arab Company for Producing Construction Materials, along with other businessmen, with loans amounting to LE214 million and other credit facilities valued at LE131 million.

MPs Ismail, chairman of the Commercial Bank of Daqahliya, and Aglan, a member of the bank's board, were accused of issuing letters of guarantee worth LE133 million and providing other credit facilities exceeding LE323 million to a number of companies owned by MPs Azzam and Mahmoud and other businessmen, including Aglan's brother, Yassin, chairman of the Misr Food Company, Fouad Hagras, a former MP and owner of Hagar Pota Trade and Development Company, and Mustafa Elba, chairman of the National Real Estate Development Company.

The case first came to public attention in August 1995 when the Administrative Control Authc ity submitted a report to the Prosecutor-General alleging that MPs Azzam and Mahmoud and businessman Elba had used forged documents to obtain hefty loans from the Commercial Bank of Daqahliya and the Nile Bank without adequate collateral. The report also asserted that MPs Ismail and Aglan had provided MPs Azzam and Mahmoud and Aglan's brother, Yassin, with more than LE200 million in loans, without collateral and against the payment of hefty commissions.

The People's Assembly was in its summer recess at the time, and Speaker Ahmed Fathi Sorour used his constitutional authority to approve a request by Justice Minister Farouq Seif El-Nasr to strip the four deputies of immunity so they could be prosecuted. The four, however, managed to retain their parliamentary seats in the November-December 1995 elections.

In January 1996, the Assembly rejected another request by the minister of justice to strip the four of their immunity, but allowed them to testify before prosecution officials. The Assembly reversed its position a month later and the four were stripped of their immunity.

MPs interviewed by *Al-Ahram Weekly* had mixed reactions to the prosecutor's decision to prosecute the four deputies. But they were in agreement that the case was unprecedented in view of the large number of businessmen and bankers involved and the huge amounts of money that had changed hands.

Raafat Seif of the leftist Tagammu Party blamed IMF-inspired liberalisation policies for the alleged escalation of financial malpractices over the past few years. "These policies have flung the door wide open for the private sector to use shady practices in its feverish pursuit of the highest possible profits, particularly in the banking and real estate sectors," said Seif. In his view, the case should serve as a warning to the government that the real estate and contracting industries must be placed under tighter control. "The majority of the loans in this case were used to buy real estate and in land speculation, particularly in up-market Cairo districts such as Zamalek and Heliopolis," he said. "Businessmen see real estate as a good investment because of the speedy and astronomical profits that can be made."

Mustafa El-Said, chairman of the Assembly's Economic Committee, was more cautious. He said that discussions within the Economic Committee had revealed that loans without collateral are not a serious phenomenon and account for little more than one per cent of total bank loans. "The amounts are too small to affect the financial position of Egyptian banks," El-Said argued, adding that despite the long investigation carried out by prosecutors, "I believe we are still not fully aware of the complete details of this case."

Ibrahim El-Nimiki, chairman of the Assembly's Legislative Committee, commented that the trial of the four deputies would not result in automatic loss of their parliamentary seats. Their membership of the house would only be forfeited after a final court judgement, followed by the approval of two thirds of the Assembly's members, he said.

Four militants sentenced to death

Four Islamist militants were condemned to death by a military court for attacks on tourists and police. **Khaled Dawoud** reports

Four people have been sentenced to death by the Supreme Military Court for carrying out attacks on tourists and police during 1993. Of the remaining 15 defendants before the court, two were sentenced to life imprisonment, three to 15 years, four to 10 years, four to five years and two were acquitted. All are members of the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, a militant group which seeks the establishment of an Islamic state.

Tight security measures were in force at the Haikstep military camp, 35km northeast of Cairo, where the trial took place. The camp was encircled by security officers, who turned back defendants' families, mostly heavily-veiled women and children. Only a handful of reporters were allowed to attend the 10-minute session on Sunday in which the judge handed down the sentences.

The defendants were charged with attacking a bus carrying Austrian tourists in 1993, injuring 16 people — eight Austrians and eight Egyptians. They were also charged of killing a top state security officer, attempting to kill the chief military prosecutor, attacking two cinemas and killing two police guards.

The defendants included two juveniles below the age of 18. One was sentenced to 10 years, the other was acquitted. Three of those condemned to death are currently serving life sentences for involvement in a failed attempt on the life of former Prime Minister Atef Sidki.

As the judge finished passing sentence, the defendants began chanting Islamist and anti-government slogans, vowing to continue the struggle to establish an Islamic state.

"Imprisonment and execution will not force us to deviate from the path of Islam," shouted one defendant as he was being handcuffed to be led away from the courtroom.

Yasser Fathi Fawwaz, 30, thought to be the leader of the group on trial, said he was happy to be sentenced to death. "I have been looking for martyrdom for a long time, and I am very happy that God has fulfilled my wish, even if it means being sent to the gallows," he said.

Fawwaz, a doctor, said he had a message for his son, Ahmed Takieddin, who was among the family members kept outside the camp: "You have to continue along the same path and avenge the killing of your father."

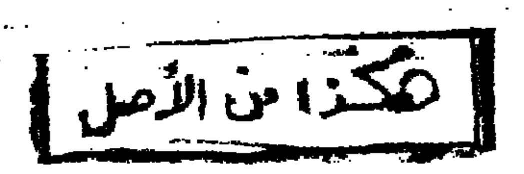
Asked how attacking tourists served his cause, Fawwaz claimed that Al-Gama'a militants did not target tourists as individuals but sought to undermine tourism generally to deprive the government of an important source of income. "We are against tourism because it brings income to this regime which is fighting God's religion. We want to destroy the economy of this secular, infidel regime," he said.

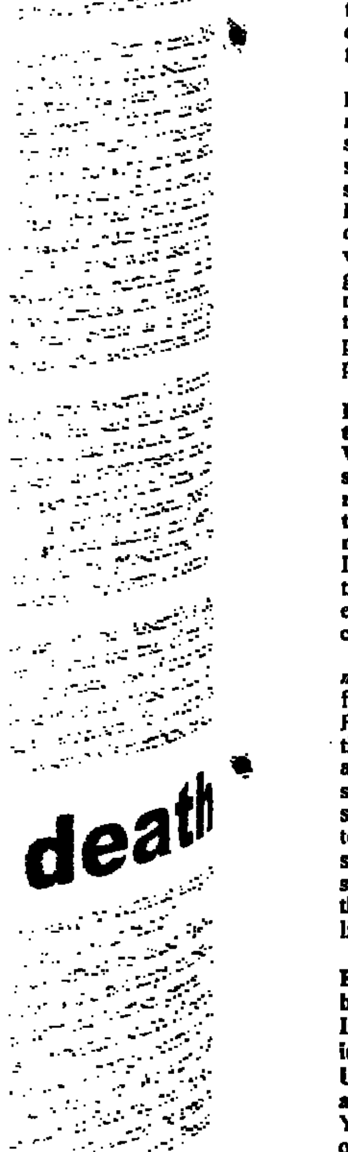
Sentences passed by military courts cannot be appealed, but the defendants have the option of asking President Hosni Mubarak for clemency.

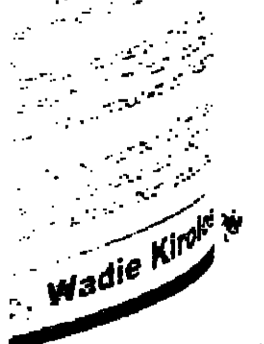
The president began referring militants involved in armed anti-government operations to military courts in late 1992 as part of an escalating clampdown on Islamist militancy.

Sunday's verdict raised to 74 the number of militants sentenced to death by military courts since late 1992. Fifty-four of these militants have already been executed.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**







Exploding definitions

This week's participants in the Ramadan debates show that difference need not mean collision. Islam and the West? Speaking to Amira Howeidy, François Burgat and Mohamed Abed Al-Jabri reach across the divide to examine the historical context of civilisational constructs, and their discontents



François Burgat is currently a researcher at the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) and IREMAM (Institut de Recherches et d'Etudes sur le Monde Arabe et Musulman). His works on Islamism have brought him international fame and a controversial reputation. Burgat's best-known works include L'Islamisme en Face *(Face to face with Islamism), Paris, La Découverte, 1995, and* The Islamic Movement in North Africa, *University of Texas Press at Austin, 1993.*

How mythical, in your view, is the "Islam versus the West" notion?
I shall probably admit that it is mythical to a great extent. But myths or ideologies, whether or not they are realistic, do play major roles in international affairs, which social scientists and politicians may not ignore, even if they do not intend to endorse them.

You generally refer to Islam and the West in terms of South and North. Does such terminology not accentuate the gap between cultures or civilisations? How do you perceive this relation?
The title of my first book indeed referred to Islam as the "Voice of the South". The rather common meaning I give to the South is indeed that of "non-Western societies" or that part of the world which used to be referred to as the Third World. I said that Islam would probably play a major role as a "terminology", a "vocabulary", or a means of "system mobilisation" which would be used by non-Western societies to counter the current hegemony of the First World. Social scientists or policy makers must deal with societies as they are and not as they would like them to be. I must deal with dominant representations as they function. The reality is that a huge majority of Westerners consider Islam the archetype of the "other". On the other hand, a huge majority of Muslims perceive the West as the archetype of the "non-Muslim" world.

I do, however, enjoy participating in those seminars where "Mediterranean culture" is emphasised as "our common heritage" etc. But I do know that many of my fellow compatriots still look at "Arabs" and "Muslims" as alien to their own intuitive universe. And I have often experienced the "same, opposite", situation among Muslims.

For this reason at least, it makes sense to refer to Islam and the West. Now, this does not mean that I support or seek to emphasise this distinction. When it comes to the content of my work, you will clearly see that its entire dynamic is to bridge the gap, to decrease the level of difference, to historicise these differences and, therefore, not to enhance them. One last comment on this danger of "enhancing differences": it should not be a pretext to deny existing confrontations. Let me use a shortcut counter-question: When denouncing Israeli occupation of the West Bank, aren't you afraid of enhancing the gap and the tensions between Arabs and Israelis? I shall not forbid myself from criticising the West, therefore, because I have the deep conviction that, as a political actor, the West does exist.

To what extent has the colonial heritage linking France and North Africa contributed to shaping this "mutual other" which you monitored in your compatriots and among Muslims?
The attitude of the French towards the Arab world and Islam is very much affected by the outcome of the colonial experience, especially in Algeria. This is probably one of the main reasons why this relation is more emotional than it is in northern Europe or even in the US.

Many Arab and Western observers like to argue that colonisation and/or the current Arab regimes are responsible for the development of Islamic groups and movements, both radical and moderate. How are revivalism and modernisation of Islam relevant to these trends?
This is an old debate. One must in fact clearly dissociate two processes. One is the process by which Muslim societies (regimes, opponents, civil society and intellectuals) react to a period of "de-culturation" linked to the colonial episode. The other is the process of radicalisation of the contemporary Islamic groups acting as political opponents to the regimes in power. This radicalisation is directly related to the attitude of most regimes, i.e. to their constant refusal of a political opening which might lead to any renewal of the elite in power.

Do you agree with the view that the impulse behind the promotion of Islam in the post-war years came from conservative Arab regimes backed by the Western powers who saw religious conservatism as a possible bulwark against instability and rebellion?
If the West could promote the Islamic movement, why can't it control or stop it now? It is this same old explanation which holds that an Arab leadership like Sadat, Bourguiba, or Boumedienne created the Islamic movement to control the Marxist opposition. Of course there is always something true in this type of explanation, but it is not, by far, a serious, comprehensive explanation.

How do you explain the contradiction between the growing racism towards Muslims living in Western nations, and the relatively flexible stance of Western governments towards Islamic regimes, such as the US's attitude toward a potential Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) government in Algeria?
I have not noticed any serious change in the US's attitude toward the FIS, except that one of the FIS leaders in exile in the US, Anwar Haddam, has been recently arrested.

Indeed, I recently read *Algeria: The Next Fundamentalist State*, an intelligent work by Graham Fuller, a former intelligence officer and social scientist. But Fuller is presently a consultant for the Rand Corporation, not for the secretary of state. Although the US has a less "emotional" understanding than the French of the situation in Algeria, the backbone of US policy, since the early eighties and the Iranian crisis, has not to my knowledge been a very different understanding of Hamas, Hizbullah or the FIS. The US still participates in the general tendency to exploit the good old "fundamentalist menace" system of political resources.

But surely the US's position on Hamas or Hizbullah arises not from the fact that they are simply Islamic organisations, but from their militant policy towards Israel. The same applies to Iran. The US's "all-too-serene" reaction to the Taliban is another irony in this context.
You are right. In fact, the sole real concern of US policy is not "human rights" or "modernity" or "women's rights". It is the ability to acquire cheap oil and the Israeli leadership's freedom to do approximately whatever it chooses to enhance Israel's so-called "security". In the case of Afghanistan, it is true that the US has supported "conservative" Islamic groups at least twice: once to oppose what used to be the number-one enemy, the USSR, and once again, more recently, to oppose the new number-one enemy in the region, Iran. But this was more a means than an end in itself.

Some French scholars have made comparisons between fundamentalism in the three monotheistic religions. How realistic are such comparisons?
It is probably very useful to compare what is going on inside Christianity, inside Israel and inside the Islamic movements. But it is very dangerous to come to analogical conclusions. If you do so, you diminish or forget what I consider the most important dynamic on earth; the North-South post-colonial dynamics. If you want to satisfy yourself by drawing the conclusion that we all have fundamentalists, you only come to a dead end in terms of analysis. If you compare Sadat's assassin with Rabin's — which is more than commonly done — you will find more differences than similarities. If you compare the Jewish settlers with Hamas militants, you skip the fact that one of them is occupying the land of the other. Moreover, you skip the fact that the 'Judeo-Christian' North has long benefited from an ideological hegemony over the South which wants to be allowed again to express itself with its own terms.

Would you apply this same understanding to the case of Refah in Turkey?
It definitely applies. I remember, seven years ago, an French diplomat who was moving to Turkey told me he was going to a place where there were no Islamists. I asked why, and he said because the people there are very moderate, they know how to read, they are civilised, so there will never be Islamists.

In theory, the reasons for the Islamists' rise to power in Turkey are even stronger than they are in Morocco or even Saudi Arabia. This is because modernisation has been expressed in radical terms of Westernisation, to such an extent that you were hanged if you wanted to wear a traditional hat, for example. So the reasons for an Islamic movement thriving in Turkey are evident. Basically, Turkey is the archetype of a process where local culture has been eradicated in the name of modernisation.

So do you think that the North will ultimately allow the South to express its own universalities?
If you are asking whether and when the West will come to a more balanced understanding of the Islamic movement and stop fueling the "Islamic menace" syndrome, my answer is: God knows. Let me just mention the fact that, in the process of "demonising" the Islamic movements, the responsibility of the West is at least shared by many Arab regimes.

Do you agree with some observers who expect the Refah experience to change Western perceptions of moderate Islamic rule, since Erbakan has proved to be as pragmatic a politician as any other?
I think that this change has already taken place. Many Westerners are simply incapable of facing the fact that the Islamists are in power in Turkey, that a woman is minister of foreign affairs, and that Turkey has not fallen apart. Definitely there is an impact, even among the secularist elite in the Arab world. I have heard representatives of those trends saying: We must admit that, when the Islamic movements come to power, they express themselves in a wide range of ways, from Taliban to Erbakan. Before that there was no Erbakan, and we used to say from Taliban to Al-Turabi. Al-Turabi was a negative reference, but Erbakan, so far, compared to his political opponents, may be considered part of the landscape. So I do believe there has been an impact.

What kind of impact do you think Refah has had on Islamic movements like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt?
You ought to ask the Muslim Brothers, but I think that it demonstrates the fact that pragmatism is an inevitable stage. And I think that Erbakan puts it very clearly when he says he can only promise that "he who asks for the implementation of *Shari'a* will no longer be put in jail." It is not much, but it is a first step. I think that Erbakan does have an impact on the Brotherhood, as manifested in the recent dissent of the Al-Wasat group.

You say the Turkish experience has had a positive impact on Western opinion, yet you also believe that the West's political reactions towards the South remain emotional. Could these emotional reactions lead to a confrontation?
I am deeply convinced there are still many prospects before confrontation. No one can expect any good of it since, due to modern technologies, both "winner" and "loser" would probably pay a most terrible price.



Mohamed Abed Al-Jabri is a professor of philosophy at Rabat University, Morocco. One of the Arab world's most eminent intellectuals, he has written extensively on contemporary Arab intellectual discourse and on East-West cross-cultural issues. Criticism of the Arab Mind *is among his most distinguished works; Al-Jabri's other writings include* Contemporary Arab Discourse: An Analytical Critical Study *and* The Question of Identity: Arabism, Islam and the West.

Have relations between Islam and the West reached a crossroads of sorts?
I have to emphasise that there is some ambiguity in the commonly used terms "Islam" and "the West", especially when we view them as opposites. "West" is a geo-political concept denoting a geographic entity and a political grouping. Islam, on the other hand, refers to a religious creed. Positing these two terms in this way is quite confusing. What do we mean by the West when we place it in opposition to Islam? What do we mean by Islam when we place it in opposition to the West?

It would seem that such a formulation is meant to stress the conflict of interests between some Western and some Third World countries, including both Arab and non-Arab Islamic countries.

But this conflict has been through various historical phases. If we limit ourselves to the era of colonial expansion followed by that of national liberation struggle, then we are really talking about a clash of interests. As in the case of the war against Iraq, the Western alliance was clear in saying that its aim was to guarantee access to oil. Here, interests talk.

I believe that we have to posit these terms in clear contexts; there is a present-day, international reality that involves interests of certain Western powers in our Arab-Islamic region. Many of our interests, as Arab-Muslim countries, stand in conflict with those of the West.

This statement is rather economistic: are you saying that centuries of hostility between the West and the Islamic countries, marked by wars and massacres, are nothing more than a conflict of interests?
The West's view of Islam, Confucianism, or any other culture for that matter, is governed by its own interests. In the '50s and '60s, the West flirted with Islam as long as it was a useful weapon against communism. The West allied itself to certain countries which claimed to be Islamic. It even recruited Islamic advocates in the struggle against communism. At that time, the West was a friend of Islam and the common enemy was communism.

When pan-Arabism dominated the Arab political scene, prompting the nationalisation of the Suez Canal — an act against Western interests — the West supported those countries in the Arab world which claimed to be Islamic, but were in reality against pan-Arab nationalism.

As long as the West's view of other cultures or religions is basically governed by its own interests, we must continue to view the clash within this context. Even today, the West is not indiscriminately hostile to Islam, as evidenced by its warm relations with certain Islamic countries which do not pose a threat to Western interests. Equally, the West may turn against secular Arab governments which pose a threat to those same interests. In my opinion, this "confrontation" has very little indeed to do with religion.

Why then, in your opinion, is the clash between Islam and the West often cited to explain tension between these interests?
It is often the case that, if the balance of interests is in the favour of one party, that party will not call a spade a spade. It would want to dissimulate its intentions with all sorts of misleading statements. If the West says that the situation in a specific region has become increasingly tense due to a conflict of interests, or that it wants access to cheap oil, or that it seeks the return of oil revenues through arms sales in this region, it will simply expose itself.

If the notion of a clash between Islam and the West is as meaningless as you say, how do you explain the popularity of a growing number of books emerging from the West which deal with the Islamic threat, such as Samuel Huntington's most recent publication?
This literature cannot be separated from the strategies of the countries in which it is published. Huntington's well-known 1993 article, published in *Foreign Affairs*, ends with the following argument: the West should reconsider the downscaling of its defense budget, and should create new weapons to prepare itself for an imminent war. Many American intellectuals and professors said at the time that Huntington wrote his article as part of a campaign to urge Congress to approve the defense budget. I believe this is quite accurate. The military-industrial complex in both the US and Europe is big business. If it grinds to a halt or shrinks, a financial and social crisis is inevitable. To avoid this, Congress must be persuaded of the vital importance of developing the arms industry further, and also of accepting the budget that will make this possible. In this respect, one can only conclude that Huntington's notion was intended to mobilise opinion inside and outside Congress by fabricating the notion of the clash of civilisations.

On the other hand, throughout history, Western culture has defined itself in opposition to an "other". For the Romans, that "other" was called the barbarians; for Europe, it was "primitive", "uncivilised" peoples. In another historical era, the West's other was the East, then communism. With the demise of communism, Islam was co-opted as the other. Why? Because, as I have said, Islam as a driving force is capable of mobilising people in defence of their own rights, which places the interests of the West in danger.

Thus, all the literature published in the West warning against future confrontations with "Muslims enraged at modernity" is not at all disinterested.

Naturally, today's media, publications and newspapers, immersed in the ever-expanding competition to get information first, also compete in publishing this kind of literature and making it available world-wide without checking its sources. Unfortunately, this material is taken seriously in the Arab world, even sometimes believed as fact.

But these very notions are also taken seriously by an important sector of Western public opinion, or how else would you explain a growing wave of racism— France is a case in point — against the large Muslim population residing in the West?
The Arab and Muslim presence in Europe and the West has to be placed within its historical framework. When Europe destroyed itself, especially in World War II, it desperately needed to rebuild itself and did so by bringing in tens of thousands of workers from North Africa, Turkey and the rest of the former colonies. Most Arab Muslims in Europe and the West moved to Europe during the colonial era. These immigrants produced new generations. Now that Europe has rebuilt its infrastructure and economy, it inevitably relinquished labour, thus producing the problem of unemployment. It was to be expected in this case that frustrated voices would blame this situation on the immigrants. We also have to view the situation of Muslim societies in Europe as we do that of foreign minorities anywhere in the world.

But an Islamic resurgence is also viewed as a threat by many Arab regimes apprehensive of the rise of political Islam. Does your analysis also apply in this case?
Indeed it does. Again, if we go back to the '40s and '50s, the zenith of the struggles for national liberation, the colonial forces described those engaged in the struggle as communists. Again, when pan-Arabism was at the forefront of the battle against imperialism during the '50s and '60s, it was branded 'secularist', 'atheist' or 'Nazi'. Communism mobilised sectors of the working class at one stage, but Arab nationalism mobilised the man on the street. In the absence of this mobilisation, neither trend would have represented any threat to the West. The intellectual drive behind most mobilisation against the West in the Arab world today is Islamist. Therefore, the West views Islam today not from a historical or a religious perspective, but through the fact that at this very moment, Islam, as a banner, is potentially the most potent mobilising force against the West. This is the focal point and it applies equally to Arab regimes.

To what extent, in your view, have political Islam and the Islamic resurgence contributed to enhancing such notions among large segments of Western public opinion?
Islamist political movements both did and did not play a role in creating this situation. They did not, because, had they used Marxist slogans instead of Islamic watchwords, nothing much in the nature of the relation would have changed. I believe that, if we were living in the Marxist era, those who act in the name of Islam probably would have acted in the name of Marxism because theirs are objective motivations. This does not, however, detract from the fact that there are cases in which certain movements caused damage to Islam as a religion and civilisation.

It is wrong to speak about a fear of Islamic movements in the West in absolute terms. The West is now silent regarding events in Afghanistan despite the violence and bloodshed, simply because these events do not conflict with Western interests. On the other hand, the rise to power of the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria in 1992 was seen as a threat by some Western powers, but not by everybody. The West's stance vis-à-vis Algeria differs according to the interests of each individual Western country.

The US, for example, did not mind the FIS's takeover. The Americans believe that their interests, namely access to oil, will not be threatened by the FIS. France's interests in Algeria, on the other hand, are different from those of the US. They are mainly cultural, besides, of course, France's financial stake. But France's main fear was the implementation of the FIS's cultural agenda, which involved Arabisation, enhancing Arab and Islamic culture, and eliminating the foundations of French cultural existence. This will seriously threaten the Francophone culture of the Maghreb region as a whole. It is natural, therefore, that France supports the current Algerian regime which happens to be dominated by Francophone officials and army generals whose cultural preferences and background are purely French.

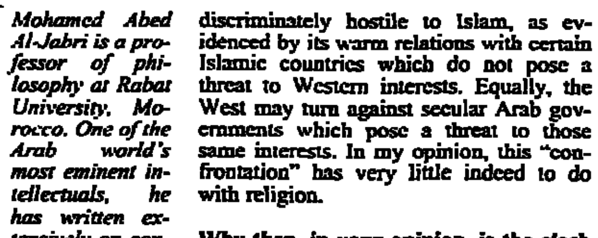
To France, the FIS represent its cultural opponent, that is why France's stance towards a potential Islamic government in Algeria is different from that of Britain, Germany or the US. One of the two FIS spokesmen in exile, Anwar Haddam, until very recently lived and operated in the US, while Sheikh Rabeh Kabir lives in Germany. Britain, on the other hand, has recently been accused by Algeria and other Arab countries of hosting terrorist leaders. So one cannot really claim that the West in general adopts a single unified stance toward Islam.

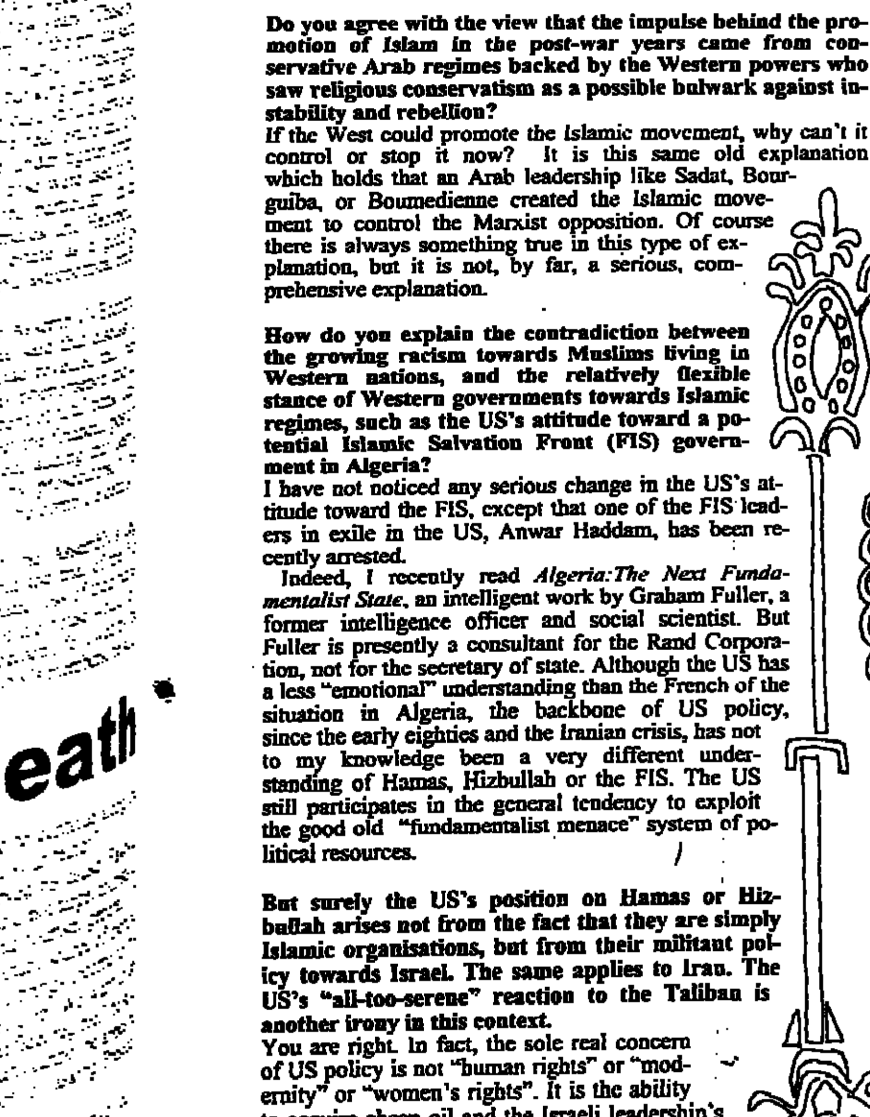
"Clash of civilisations" or clash of interests: as long as the confrontations continue it is bound to shape each party's perception of the other. How does Arab-Islamic culture reflect this relation with the West?
One can cite the effect of the Gulf War. While parts of the eastern Arab world (the Mashriq) were Westernised, the Mahgreb, supposedly more Westernised, was Arabised.

How did this come about?
It is in the nature of cultures to react against perceived hostility. Thus, when a major event like the Gulf War occurs, recruiting all the weapons and media tools in the Western arsenal, one automatically feels that the West is something and "I" am something else. The contemporary intelligentsia in the Maghreb, originally graduated from French institutes, was shocked at the attacks on Iraq. The intellectuals were shocked by the West and its lack of respect for democracy or the civil liberties it claims to uphold. The Western Alliance did not bombard Iraq in the name of democracy but for purely materialistic motivations related to its interests in the Gulf. This shock enhanced a stronger sense of Arab belonging in the Maghreb. On the other hand, some Gulf countries viewed the West as their saviour, and this feeling was marked by a distinct wave of Westernisation which took various forms.

Do you envision any scenarios for possible confrontations between the West and Islam?
As I previously said, I do not like setting these two terms in opposition. Islam and the West can only be viewed separately. Islam is us, the Muslims, and nothing else. Islam is not a concrete thing, it is the state that we are in. If our conditions improved, the definition of Islam would change accordingly and vice versa.

But envisioning the state of Muslims in the upcoming century is quite difficult. I believe that the Muslims, among the peoples of the Third World, are in a state of poverty and oppression that cannot grow any worse. The real problem lies in the "explosions" that can occur as a result of the increase of wealth in the West. When poverty exceeds all limits, it does not necessarily create a threat. But when wealth exceeds all limits, it has to cause an explosion and I think that if an explosion occurs in the upcoming century, it will be in the West, not in the Islamic countries.





Secret contacts

ISRAELI Foreign Minister David Levy revealed yesterday that he is engaged in indirect contacts with Damascus. He told Israeli radio that he is now ready to meet his Syrian counterpart Farouk Al-Sharaa to discuss reviving the peace process based on the "land for peace" formula.

Levy refused to discuss publicly the details of the exchange. The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* said a senior European diplomat was involved in the exchanges. It also said that European officials hoped to arrange a meeting between Levy and Al-Sharaa in April to further a joint Middle Eastern, North African and European peace effort, according to Reuters.

Syria turned down calls by Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu for an unconditional resumption of talks. The Syrian government daily insisted that the talks, frozen for the last year, should resume where they left off under the former Labour government. The agreement in principle at the time was that Israel would withdraw from the Golan Heights in exchange for a full peace treaty.

Meanwhile, US Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk appealed to Syria on Tuesday to use the agreement on Hebron as a springboard to further peacemaking. He confirmed that a US diplomatic campaign was under way to put new life into the broader peace effort and to restart negotiations with Syria.

The renewed interest in the Syrian-Israeli peace talks was highlighted by an Israeli intelligence report that put the probability of conflict with Syria at the top of the list of Israeli worries if talks are not resumed this year.

Consensus snags

AN ATTEMPT by Israeli legislators to reach a consensus on a final settlement with the Palestinians ran into snags when hardliners on both sides of the political divide exchanged positions. Michael Eitan from the ruling Likud Party, traditionally regarded as a hawk, and the dovish Labour Party lawmaker Yossi Beilin, failed yesterday to win approval of the document by the Knesset.

Ephraim Sneh, a minister in the previous Labour government, said that the agreement does not offer an independent state to the Palestinians, nor does it promise that Israel will stop expanding the Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

Likud's Michael Kleiner, however, said that he would not sign the agreement because it does not guarantee Israeli control of the international border crossing points and does not prevent the return of Palestinian refugees.

Kleiner also objected to the document's offer to hand over 50 per cent of the territory in the occupied West Bank to the Palestinians before an agreement is reached on the permanent borders. The final status talks, which are expected to begin soon, are supposed to resolve ultra-sensitive issues, such as the status of Jerusalem, the Jewish settlements and the question of Palestinian statehood.

Sanctions ignored

LIBYA officially informed the United Nations Security Council that it will resume international flights in violation of the UN sanctions imposed against it in 1992 following the nation's refusal to hand over two suspects wanted in connection with the 1988 bombing of a Pan Am flight over Scotland.

In a letter addressed to the Council, Libya said it was no longer required to abide by the sanctions since it granted permission to American millionaire Steve Foster last week to cross its air space as part of his drive to become the first balloonist to circle the globe nonstop.

The letter has yet to be translated from Arabic, but a source at the UN Sanctions Committee rejected Libya's claim and said it was unlikely the sanctions will be lifted.

Yemen election

THE TWO parties of Yemen's ruling coalition, the Islah Party and the General People's Congress, agreed on constructive cooperation and friendly competition in the run-up to the national parliamentary elections due to be held on 27 April. The parties pledged to honour the democratic experiment and to act within the boundaries of the law and electoral regulations.

The parliamentary elections will be the third since the unification of the country. So far, the run-up to the election has been accompanied by much political speculation and electoral manoeuvring, with both parties of the ruling coalition levelling accusations against each other's policies and intentions.

Hebron — old and new

"Hebron is ours," chanted Palestinians as the Israeli army redeployed. But is it? **Graham Usher** writes from the West Bank city

At dawn on 17 January, the last truckload of Israeli soldiers left most of Hebron. In a simple ceremony, the Israeli commander in Hebron, Gabi Ophir, shook hands with the new Palestinian Authority (PA) commander, Awni Natshe. He also transferred control of the Imara military compound, a British-built fort which, for the last 29 years, has served as the HQ for Israel's occupation in the Hebron region.

As the Israeli truck sped away, a Palestinian climbed on top of the fort, tearing down the Israeli flag, setting aloft the Palestinian one. "Hebron is ours, Hebron is ours!" chanted several thousand Palestinians, who had braved the cold night to see this moment. It had been a brilliant winter's day, yet by noon a storm was threatening — and not just from the skies.

This is because, as everyone of Hebron's 120,000 Palestinians knows, Hebron is not entirely theirs. Hebron's modern suburbs cover around 80 per cent of the city's municipal area. There, 400 blue uniformed Palestinian police can now be seen patrolling beats and directing traffic. In Hebron's religious and commercial centre, however, the reality is less novel.

The redeployment coincided with the second Friday of Ramadan. That day, an estimated 10,000 Palestinians attended noon prayers at Al-Ibrahimi Mosque, the burial site of Abraham. According to the agreement on Hebron, the mosque is to stay under Israel's military rule for the next three months, after which its status is to be discussed. To enter and leave the mosque, Palestinians are frisked at three Israeli checkpoints. In the past, restrictions like these have deterred attendance. But the mass turn-out on the day of Israel's redeployment was a message, says Hebron journalist Khalid Amayreh. "It shows Palestinians are not going to put up with the partitioning of the town."

This is the Palestinians' greatest fear in Hebron — that the agreement's "interim" partition will become Hebron's permanent arrangement, conferring on Hebron's Jewish settlers an international legitimacy which, prior to Oslo, was always withheld. The infrastructure for partition is already in place.

The mosque is in the heart of Israeli-controlled Hebron. This is "home" to 235 Jewish settlers, 20,000 Palestinians and, with the redeployment, the base of around 1,000 Israeli soldiers and police. Israeli politicians refer to this as Hebron's "Jewish quarter." But it is not a Jewish quarter. It is a military camp.

On every roof and siding of Hebron's old vegetable market there are Israeli soldiers. Huge Israeli flags flutter from the various houses that, over the last 18 years, settlers have occupied. For Palestinians living in the old city, the future appears every bit as bleak as the past. "Nothing has changed," says Said Dana. "We are still under occupation. The only difference now is we will be harassed twice, once by the Israeli soldiers and once by the Palestinian police."

It was against this mixed background that Yasser Arafat, on 19 January, paid his first visit to Hebron in 32 years. Flown in by helicopter (with the usual Israeli air escort), the PLO leader addressed a crowd of over 20,000 from the balcony of the Imara.

He tailored his speech to his mixed audience. To those Palestinians sceptical as to whether the whole Oslo experiment has been worth the compromises, he said: "They told us it would be Gaza/Jericho first and last. But we got Nablus, Ramallah and Bethlehem and now Hebron and, God willing, on to Jerusalem as the capital of our independent state." He stressed that the fact that 87 (out of 120) Knesset members had voted for the Hebron redeployment was "something new in the Middle East." He even flew a conciliatory kite to Hebron's settlers. "We don't seek confrontation with you," he said. "I remember those of you who came to see me [in Bethlehem two months ago] saying you wanted a just and comprehensive peace. We, too, seek a just and comprehensive peace." The first two comments drew applause from the crowd; the third, a long silence.

Arafat's principal message to Hebron was that of national unity. It is a wise position. "The PA cannot rule Hebron the way it has ruled the other Palestinian cities," says Hebron Palestinian Council member, Rafiq Natshe. "We are a very clan-based society. It is not just a question of Fatah versus Hamas in Hebron. These political differences are based on older loyalties of tribe and clan."

After his speech, Arafat met with various representatives of Hebron's Islamist opposition. He urged them to abandon any plans of armed attacks against settlers in the old city for fear that Netanyahu would use this to evade commitment to Israel's further West Bank redeployments. He was told that Hamas would not "undermine the Palestinians' national interests," a line most read as signifying that Hamas' opposition in Hebron is likely to be political rather than military. But this — as so much in Hebron — depends ultimately on the behaviour of the settlers and the Israeli army.

"We accept the Israeli redeployment as fact and will build relations on this," said Jawad Jabari, a student at Hebron's Islamic University, in an interview in *The Jerusalem Post* on 21 January. But "there is a sea of blood between Hebron's residents and the settlers. No one can forget the massacre at the mosque [in February 1994] and I cannot say Hamas has dropped armed struggle as its strategic choice."

Hebron deal as model for Jerusalem?

Palestinian euphoria, on the eve of the Israeli withdrawal from Hebron, was replaced by resentment and fear at the sight of Jewish settlers roaming around the holy city. **Sherine Bahaa** reports



Palestinian President Yasser Arafat waves to the enormous crowd that turned out to greet him last Sunday as he enters Hebron standing up in his limousine. Some 25,000 supporters turned out to cheer his arrival, totally surrounding his car while waving the flags. *(photo: Reuters)*

Even though it took months to finalise a comprehensive deal on Hebron, Palestinians in general and Hebronites in particular do not seem impressed by their government's achievement. Abdel-Jawad Saleh, member of the Palestinian Authority, walked out from a Legislative Council meeting, calling the deal unfair to Palestinians and to the future of the city.

In spite of the jubilation expressed by Palestinians on the eve of the Israeli redeployment from their holy city of Hebron, fears remain about the actual content of the deal and the modifications it has imposed on the already signed Oslo deal.

Hebronites cannot visualise living with Jewish settlers in their midst, blood baths and massacres lingering in their memory. Palestinians in Hebron cannot forget their countrymen who were massacred on 29 February 1994 by Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein while kneeling in prayer at Al-Ibrahimi Mosque.

According to Saleh, Palestinian minister of agriculture, settlers, especially those in Hebron, are the founders of what is now called Israeli terrorism. "If one goes back about 15 years, one finds rabbis like Wieldman and Livenger who are responsible for the attempted murder of three of the city's mayors," Saleh declared.

For Palestinians, Hebron will probably remain a magnet for Israeli-Arab violence even after deployment, which in effect amounts to the partitioning of the city. About 400 militant Jewish settlers live in the heart of Hebron. An additional 5,000 live in fenced enclaves on the edge of this city of 160,000 Palestinians which contains the tomb of the biblical Abraham — a site revered by Jews and Muslims alike.

A number of meetings were held this week inside and outside the territories in which Palestinians and especially Hebronites expressed objection to the deal. Waheed Al-Jaebari, who heads a group of Hebronites living in Jordan, expressed his people's rejection of the deal. "We reject both the Taba and Oslo agreements. Any deal that does not state in its clauses the total withdrawal of Jews is rejected," Al-Jaebari declared.

Speaking on behalf of the Khalil Al-Rahman society, Al-Jaebari reiterated that Hebronites would never give up the holy Abraham Mosque. The Tomb of Abraham is considered the fourth holiest shrine to Muslims. Palestinians usually end their pilgrimage to Mecca by visiting the holy site.

"The Israelis played a tricky game in their deal. First, they referred to the Tomb of Abraham as the tomb of the prophets and claimed that their own prophets are buried there. Secondly, the agreement spoke about Jewish sites while the Jews have neither historical nor religious roots in Hebron," said Al-Jaebari.

According to Hebronites, the agreement is shameful because it gives 20 per cent of the city to the Israelis. "This 20 per cent is the old city and what is left is actually outside the borders of the main city and the Tomb of Abraham. They are mere farms." According to observers, the accord leaves many questions unanswered.

Saleh's objection to the deal rests on two factors. First, he opposes the division of the city not only from the security point of view but on the infrastructural level as well. According to the agreement, that part of Hebron which belongs to the Israelis will be ruled militarily. Secondly, he resents the decision to postpone the issue of the Tomb of Abraham, an issue which was supposed to have been finalised six months ago. "I will reject any agreement that will deprive us of our rights as Muslims at the Abraham site," Saleh reiterated.

The Hebronites' concern was reflected in their cool reception to the Palestinians who came to take up the mundane business of manning checkpoints and directing traffic in the city's streets. This reception exhibited none of the jubilation seen in Palestinian takeovers of other West Bank cities. With Israeli forces still in place to oversee parts of Hebron. "We laugh when we hear the word liberation. We did not hear guns and liberation is brought about by force," said Arafat Hegazi, another Hebronite living in Amman.

Hegazi laments the fate of Arabs living in Jewish areas, who will now be forced to take Israeli nationality. For Hegazi, the 15 January agreement represents more Palestinian concessions, such as giving Israelis more zones within the Palestinian-held areas. Israel's pretext for gaining control of more territories was mainly military — in other words the monitoring of Palestinian sites. Furthermore, Israelis were granted five additional enclaves which they claimed as holy sites. Even though Israel occupied Hebron for more than 30 years, there had been no previous mention of such sites. "Thus, it became clear that Jews will not be confined to Jewish areas but their presence will be seen in the rest of Arab cities," Hegazi explains.

Moreover, paving roads to link Jewish cities together and building walls to separate them from neighbouring Arab cities will entail the demolition of Arab houses. "By renaming the Jewish parts of Hebron "Kiryat Araba", Israel is using a tactic they will eventually use in the case of Jerusalem," said Hegazi.

In Jerusalem, what the Palestinians want is the old city, which lies within the walls, but Israel built a village outside the walls and called it Abu Dees. It is within this context that the issue of Jerusalem will be discussed. Jerusalem, will go to the Israelis leaving Abu Dees for the Arabs.

South Africa's choice

Mandela is severing the umbilical cord that had once tied apartheid South Africa to Israel, writes **Mohamed Sabrine** in Johannesburg

South Africa is acutely aware of the price it would inevitably pay were it to pursue a course contrary to the wishes of the US administration, Israel and the South African Zionist lobby. However, it also has one eye fixed on the economic benefits it could reap by opening up to the Arab world and its huge oil revenues. It is in this context that South African President Nelson Mandela's cabinet met yesterday to discuss a planned sale of military equipment worth $641 million to Syria despite strong American objections.

Mandela has made it clear that South Africa cannot permit other nations to dictate its foreign policy. South Africa, which has incurred Washington's wrath by strengthening its diplomatic ties with Libya, Iran and Cuba, is competing with three unnamed European countries to supply Syria with an electronic system providing computerised control for the cannons of tanks and howitzers. The US warned that it will cut off aid worth $110 million to South Africa if Pretoria goes ahead with the Syrian deal.

South Africa is facing a "moral dilemma." While it feels it has a commitment to support the legitimate rights of the Palestinians and the Arabs who backed South Africa in its long struggle against apartheid, it is equally aware of the "useful political option" of toeing the American line.

The arms deal with Syria and Mandela's forthcoming visit to the Middle East triggered off extensive debates in South Africa. The consensus was not for the government to maintain a neutral stance but to adopt a definitely biased position in favour of Israel and the Zionist lobby.

Many feel that South Africa has succeeded in "disengaging" itself from its formerly close relationship with Israel. The editor-in-chief of the *Sunday Independent* and former correspondent of the *Christian Science Monitor* in Israel regards the visit of South Africa's foreign minister to Israel and Palestine in February 1995 as an official severance of the umbilical cord that tied South Africa to Israel. It amounted to a recognition of the state of Palestine by post-apartheid South Africa. He argues that the visit was a dramatic break from the past. In this not-so-distant past, South African officers of the apartheid regime travelled secretly to Israel to discuss political and military matters.

Today, the military ties between the two countries are the outcome of agreements already in place. The South African Armed Forces' commander-in-chief's visit to Israel was aimed at assuring Tel Aviv that a "political miracle" has already taken place in South Africa. There is no longer a need to fear the "former Communists" in the government or that relations with militant Middle Eastern countries like Iran constitute a threat to Israel.

The Mossad, Israel's secret service, has repeatedly leaked out false information — consistently denied by Pretoria — regarding a nuclear agreement between Iran and South Africa, the involvement of Iranian intelligence in the training of the South African military and cooperation between Pretoria and Tehran in fighting crime and drugs. Israel has expressed its indignation at South Africa's arms deal with Syria on the grounds that such a deal would disrupt the balance of power in the Middle East.

Other objections have come from the Israeli lobby in South Africa. This lobby derives its power from the rich and influential Jewish community that dominates economic activity and controls the South African media. It has consistently criticised Alfred Nzo, South Africa's foreign minister, and defended Israel's position. A commentator on South Africa's Radio 702 has even urged Netanyahu to give priority to security over peace.

While the Middle East peace process staggered due to the Likud's procrastination and Netanyahu's shirking of his country's commitments under the peace agreements, the *Star*, one of the local newspapers with ties to the Israeli lobby, issued a warning to Mandela. It reminded him that he will not receive a hero's welcome in the Middle East, that visiting Hebron would not be the same as visiting London and that he may very well find himself in a diplomatic swamp. The paper wound up by saying that gravity alone would not carry Mandela through the political mines he would encounter in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, *Business Day*, another South African paper which reflects the views of the financial and business sector, asserted that since his release from prison in 1990, Mandela has been prone to be influenced in his reactions to world crises by moral considerations. *Business Day* keenly urged Mandela to go to the Middle East since he is the one and only leader in the world who enjoys a high moral standing that qualifies him to speak his mind freely to both parties.

However, the three billion rand arms sales to Syria provoked a violent reaction from both the National Party (which represents the former racist regime) and the Democratic Party, in which the Israeli lobby has strong leverage. Douglas Gibson, the military affairs speaker in the Democratic Party, noted that "certain individuals and states who supported the ANC when it was banned may not be the right people we should seek to befriend at the expense of others who can give us greater support in boosting our economy and raising the standard of living of our people." The arms deal with Syria drew much opposition on grounds of risking US anger.

The Palestinian ambassador to Pretoria, Salman Al-Serfi, contends that South Africa is an important country to involve more positively in the Middle East. Like Palestinians, South Africans have lived under a racist, oppressive regime. Israel, he noted, used to be a strategic ally of the apartheid regime in South Africa. He calls on "South Africans to cleanse their country from the remains of oppressive racist policies exemplified in the military cooperation between Israel and the former regime in South Africa. The Palestinian administration appreciates the efforts of the government of Mandela, the freedom fighter, to terminate all military cooperation with Israel and to abolish the most serious aspect of this cooperation, especially in nuclear arms." The ambassador described Israel as an expansionist country occupying Arab land in Syria and Lebanon. Therefore, exporting arms to Israel would impede the peace process and fuel further aggression against the Palestinian people. Al-Serfi called on Mandela to urge Israel to comply fully with the agreements in place between the PLO and Israel.

The Zionist lobby's demands that South Africa adopt a neutral stand is biased. Neither the Arab countries nor the PLO adopted a neutral stance vis-à-vis South Africa's struggle for freedom. The Arabs stood by South Africa's majority right to freedom and equality, while Israel sided with apartheid and racism. The government of South Africa is surely aware of the vast economic benefits to be had in cooperating with Arab and Islamic countries, the countries that support the Palestinians' struggle to regain their rights and their usurped land. The US itself upholds the principle of land for peace.

South Africa's peacemakers are striving to break free of the Zionist lobby's stranglehold and are aware that cooperation with the Middle Eastern and Gulf countries requires genuine tokens of friendship and some political commitment on the part of South Africa. Bilateral relations have been built over long years and stem from a profound sense of mutual trust and confidence that make tilting towards the enemy camp wholly inconceivable.

Mandela, the symbol of the liberation of South Africa, stands firm for moral standards. He will not be unfaithful to his years of struggle or compromise on his principle of support for the Palestinian people. He will push forward the efforts for a peaceful settlement and for the restoration of Arab lands. Whether or not this is attainable, Mandela will not bow to pressure from the Zionist lobby.

Albright's bottom line

Lamis Andoni in Washington gets down to the bottom of the "Albright doctrine" and finds US economic expansion

Madeleine Albright, who was confirmed this week as the new secretary of state, has started pushing for her doctrine on American foreign policy. Based on a strong and assertive international role for the United States, the "Albright doctrine" suggests that the US should be more assertive in defending its interests and flex its military muscle if need be. American interests, as defined by Albright, centre on economic expansionism in the world market, particularly in Asia and Eastern Europe. Although she professes a strong commitment to human rights, she also indicates that economic interests come first.

In the Albright era, as the new secretary of state has indicated in her congressional confirmation hearing last week, two concerns will be on top of the American foreign policy agenda. The security and integration of Eastern Europe into the Western capitalist market and political system and the accommodation of China — the emerging power in Asia — will be considered of primary importance.

"America should remain a European power. America should remain a Pacific power," Albright said at the hearing, spelling out the main pillars of her vision for a future foreign policy. In order for the US to assume the role of a major power in Europe and in Asia, however, it should be ready to use its military force to assert itself, was the thrust of Albright's argument.

Albright's call for a greater American role in Eastern Europe and Asia seems to aim at ensuring the American economic expansion in the new and vast markets of Western Asia and Eastern Europe. Albright, who was born in Czechoslovakia, emphasises a commitment to democratisation and a tough stand against remaining socialist governments in Eastern Europe, while in Asia she endorses a constructive engagement with China to protect American economic interests.

Interestingly enough, the Middle East has not yet figured prominently in Albright's "vision" for her country's foreign policy. Even though she asserts that she will be personally involved in formulating the US Middle Eastern policies, her statements were a mere reiteration of US stands. Judging by her testimony, Albright considers that American goals and interests will be best achieved and preserved by ensuring Israeli security, fostering the success of the US-led Middle East peace process and pursuing the dual containment of Iraq and Iran. Both of these countries she describes as "rogue and lawless states."

Albright ignored protesters who broke into the hearings to protest the embargo. Her commitment to continue with the sanctions suggests that she will not hesitate to recommend military intervention against either of these two countries or any that is seen to be a threat to the US. "The Cold War is over and the threat has been reduced but not eliminated," she warned.

In principle, Albright will have no problem winning the support of a Republican-dominated Congress that agrees with her tough stand in defence of American interests. However, Albright's arguments in favour of the wider deployment of American forces are expected to encounter resistance in a Congress that resents the prospects of endangering the lives of American troops.

In her confirmation hearing, Albright stressed that the US government should not be hesitant to deploy forces when needed. "We must be more than an audience, more even than actors. We must be the authors of our new age," she said in her opening statements. At the same time, she made clear that American interests will define and dictate the extent of American involvement: "We are not a charity or a fire department. We will defend firmly our own vital interests."

In response to questioning by congressmen, she explained that while she does not advocate automatically sending American soldiers to conflict-ridden areas, she would press for military deployment in certain situations. Analysts in Washington believe that if Albright successfully pushes for her "doctrine", it will signal the end of what is known to strategists as the more cautious "Powell doctrine." Colonel Colin Powell made his reputation as a tough commander in the 1991 war against Iraq but he has since argued for a more judicious deployment of American troops. Powell's views, endorsed by outgoing Defence Secretary William Perry, are said to be influenced by the fear of repeating the American quagmire in Vietnam. Consequently, Powell opposes the deployment of troops when the stakes are high.

The differences between the "Powell doctrine" and Albright's approach were highlighted during a clash between the two over the situation in Bosnia. According to Powell's published memoirs, Albright was pressing for a direct American military intervention while the colonel advised against placing the troops' lives in danger. An angry Powell responded to Albright by reminding her that American troops are not "toy soldiers".

Whether Albright will succeed in implementing a greater American involvement in world affairs remains to be seen. Whatever the case, what has transpired so far is that Albright is bringing with her to the State Department an almost black and white view of the world, reminiscent of the Cold War era. It can tolerate "grey" areas, but only if that serves American economic interests.

Albright's vision of a world divided into "bad guys" and "good guys", she claims, is defined by her commitment to human rights and political freedom. In her testimony, she vowed to be uncompromising in pursuing and defending universal human rights. Yet, as soon as she got to the specifics of the US ties with China, she defended them on the basis of America's interests and pushed the human rights issue to the back burner. In fact, at one point, Albright was blunt in defining one of the main objectives of American policy as the opening of markets to American commodities because, in her view, they should be available to anyone who wants them.

As is the case with most American officials, Albright's "vision" equates free-market policies with democracy and human rights. She indicated that American relations with other countries will depend on these countries' commitment to free market and democratic values. "We have no permanent enemies but permanent principles," she announced in an ironic twist of the famous saying. However, these principles were left open to interpretation. She strongly argued against the isolation of China but called Cuba the shame of Latin America, disregarding the poor human record of other Latin American countries that have endorsed the free market.

Albright is viewed as a true champion of the American way of life against communism — her family fled communist Prague. She seems determined to continue her crusade in the defence of the "American dream." In her opening statements, she explained that she had not expected as a child of immigrants, whose primary goal when she arrived in America was to learn English, to become a secretary of state taking part in formulating her adopted country's foreign policy. Her personal history won her immediate respect in Congress but her statements made her sound more royal than the king.



President William Jefferson Clinton greets soul singer Stevie Wonder in Washington on the occasion of Clinton's inauguration. The deplorable state of race relations in America today, national unity, and the transition from the industrial to the information age set the tone of the presidential homily. The ceremonies were marked by razzmatazz, pomp and pageantry. During the celebrations, Clinton recalled the "darkest days of 1994 and 1995" after the Democrats were devastated by Republican victories that gave the Republicans control over the Congress. Nevertheless, Clinton urged America's political leaders to lay down their "partisan sniping" and "think big" *(photo:Reuters)*

Exit Yeltsin, enter Lebed?

Political stability in Russia precariously teeters on Yeltsin's health, writes **Abdel-Malek Khalil** from Moscow

Over the last year, Boris Yeltsin has been plagued with various ailments, including a notorious bout with alcoholism. However, it was only after his quintuple bypass surgery last November, followed by his current affliction with double pneumonia that many Russians finally wrote him off as unable to lead the country. The Russian president appeared unwell when he met with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl on 6 January. During the chancellor's visit, Yeltsin looked frail and had to lean on Kohl for support.

Two days later, Yeltsin checked into Moscow's Central Clinical Hospital. He has not been seen in person or on televised footage since. His aides and doctors, however, continue to assert that he is on his way to a full recovery, while his supporters say that his power-hungry detractors are exaggerating the seriousness of his condition.

Notwithstanding the official display of optimism, many Yeltsin supporters now privately predict that he may not complete his term in office — considering that he is seriously ill and old, by Russian standards. At age 65, Yeltsin has already outlived the life expectancy of the average Russian male by six years. The media, which almost unanimously backed Yeltsin's re-election campaign, now shows signs of discontent. The Russian daily *Izvestia*, formerly staunchly loyalist to Yeltsin, recently deplored the country's lack of stability under Yeltsin's "shadow government".

Yeltsin's opponents claim that he is unable to work for more than 15 minutes a day. The result is a virtual state of anarchy. Business deals are settled by mob hits, the latest occurring last Friday and killing businessman Gennady Ozen in a downtown bomb explosion. The huge stakes in pay-offs, embezzlement and contract monies — resulting from Russia's head-over-heels privatisation drive to a market economy — have led to hundreds of contract killings of business people. Mafia gangs operate with impunity in Russian cities where the crime rate is the highest in the world.

The Mafia controls the country and "has penetrated the highest levels of government," explains sociologist Ryszard Kapuscinski. A recent case in point was the appointment of shady entrepreneur and media magnate Boris Berezovsky to the powerful Security Council. Engineered by Anatoly Chubais, one of Yeltsin's top aides, this appointment places a man notorious for his unorthodox business deals and Mafia connections in a position of official power. "The criminalisation of authority is today the most dangerous development, one that was set off by the president's health condition," former St Petersburg mayor, Anatoly Sobchak, told the *Interfax* news agency.

Meanwhile, the opposition has vigorously called for Yeltsin's impeachment on the grounds of ill health. Legal advisers, however, warned that such a move would be unconstitutional, suggesting that Yeltsin should be advised to resign instead. Viktor Ilyukhin, the Communist deputy who drafted an impeachment resolution, said that he would still go ahead with proceedings.

Given the plausible scenario that Yeltsin may soon exit the Kremlin, General Alexander Lebed, Yeltsin's sacked Security Council adviser, has been grooming himself for the top job. In this context, Lebed's appearance at US President Bill Clinton's inauguration ceremony this week could be read as a presidential candidate's move.

Praise the Nation

Gamal Nkrumah hears of African American grievances from one of America's most controversial men, Nation of Islam leader, Minister Louis Farrakhan who stopped over in Cairo last weekend

With a wit and erudition that are all too rare among religious figures, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan apologised profusely for "talking too much." He has a sharp sense of humour. "It is because I was a teacher and I am a preacher." Taken out of context, his criticism of Jews sounds preposterous. Farrakhan says that he is no anti-Semite, but he is not afraid to venture into the prickly realms of fighting against racial injustice in America, the Muslim world and Africa. There is a lot that can be learned from the West, Farrakhan confessed. His most poignant statements, however, are those addressing racial injustice in America and the Western world.

I was taken aback, but pleasantly surprised when I met him — the minister was dressed casually. He sported what in Africa is termed a black political shirt, black leather trousers and an elegant black leather coat. The stern black outfit was becoming and offset the jovial mood of the minister. It was around 2.00am and Farrakhan and his entourage had just flown across Africa. He had come from Accra, the Ghanaian capital, to attend the inauguration of President Jerry John Rawlings. Before that, he had been in Libya and Cairo on his way to Sudan. In effect, Farrakhan is a diplomat who in Africa, the Middle East and much of the Muslim world receives the red carpet treatment normally reserved for heads of state.

I listened intently to his account of his shuttle diplomacy in the region. His numerous trips have taken him to Tehran, Baghdad and Damascus. Farrakhan and his entourage were the first to cross the Syrian-Iraqi border after relations between the two Arab states plummeted to an all time low following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and their common border was closed. In the middle of nowhere a convoy of 35 Mercedes-Benz limousines came to pick the Farrakhan party up to take them to Damascus to meet President Hafez Al-Assad.

Even though he is not regarded as a true believer by many conventional Muslims, Farrakhan was the first African American to be invited into Mecca. He talked of his impressions of the mullahs ruling in Tehran, southern Lebanese Muslim clerics, Baath Party officials in Damascus and Baghdad, Sudan's Parliament Speaker and leader of the National Islamic Front Hassan Al-Turabi and a host of leading regional personalities.

How did he emerge as a friend of the representatives of what Washington calls the "rogue nations"? I put the question to Farrakhan and pondered the political implications of a leader of an African American Muslim group with a following of some two million people exercising such power and earning such respect in the Middle East. Farrakhan has encountered enough enemies of the US — whom the Pentagon and Central Intelligence Agency officials would do just about anything to lay their hands on — to be a wanted man in his own country.

Recounting an earlier visit to Cairo, Farrakhan stressed the importance of Afro-Arab unity. "My first visit to Cairo was in 1977. I came to Cairo to attend the first Afro-Arab summit meeting. I came as part of the Ugandan delegation. It was a memorable experience," he said. "There has not been an Arab-African summit since," he added. What were his most memorable moments in Africa? He chuckled and, after a short pause, said "The *durbar* staged in my honour in Maiduguri, northern Nigeria," he said. "And in Uganda too. In the northern town of Gulu, where I spoke to a group of Acholi people. I spoke to them about liberation and the potential of the black man. They were Christians but they warmed up to my message of liberation," Farrakhan mused.

African-Arab relations are fast deteriorating. There are hurt sensitivities in Africa about the Arab slave trade and Arab attitudes of superiority. Even though Farrakhan is essentially an African American Muslim leader, he is deeply interested in African-Arab relations and in cementing ties between Africans north and south of the Sahara. He has tried to take part in efforts to stop the war in southern Sudan. Farrakhan has met both SPLA leader John Garang and the authorities in Khartoum. It was Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni who arranged for Farrakhan to meet with Garang.

According to Farrakhan, the Western media is adding a new slant to the sensitive issue of the alleged Arab enslavement of Africans in Sudan, Mauritania and other Sahelian countries. The Western media depicts Arab and African economic interests as contradictory rather than complimentary. Farrakhan feels that he has a special mission to bridge the cultural divide between Africans and Arabs, African American Muslims and Muslims in the Middle East. Most importantly, he works to dissolve the spurious distinction between African and Arab strategic objectives. "Africans and Arabs share the same destiny. They have been colonised by the same European powers. They are at a similar level of economic development," Farrakhan said. As his Million Man March shows, his message is as much about economic empowerment as political emancipation.

Does the US have the right to preach to African, Asian, Latin American and Middle Eastern nations about human rights? What about human rights in America itself?

We believe that America's way of dealing with nations, particularly those she sees as enemies, is outmoded, outdated and unproductive. We believe that if America adopted a better methodology, Libya, Iran, Iraq, Sudan and Cuba, which the US now feels are enemies would welcome a new and better relationship with America.

Prodding nations towards respect for the human rights of its citizens is proper only for a moral leader. The government of the US uses its awesome influence in the United Nations to bully nations like Libya, Iraq and Cuba.

The provision of food and medical and health care are fundamental human rights. How can America claim to be the champion of human rights? But those human rights are not for Cubans because they don't like their politics, for Iraqis because they don't like Saddam Hussein, the Libyans because they disagree with Goddafi and don't like their religion.

But Allah gives rain and sunshine and air to all of us whether we believe in him or not. It seems to me that God is the best example of a true superpower to give human rights and nudge people along to be more humane.

Now coming to Africa, we know that human rights abuses occur not only in America but in every nation of the earth. And every nation needs to be much more sensitive to human needs and the rights of human beings. Every political leader and every spiritual leader needs a broader definition of what human rights are. We can all see how much we all are in violation of the human rights of the human family. That is why there is so much dissatisfaction, revolution, strife, strikes, hatred.

Black people, African Americans are becoming a political force. We admire the Jews of America inasmuch as there are only six million of them but they wield tremendous influence. We [African Americans] are 30 million, and with about $438 billion in purchasing power, we are the ninth largest nation in the world in terms of purchasing power. So we have tremendous potential. We must get our people to maximise that political and economic potential, particularly now that America is the world's only superpower.

America is a military superpower, an economic and political superpower, but it is not a moral superpower. If we maximise our potential, we can help America become a moral superpower. We could also influence foreign policy objectives to be much more morally sensitive to the needs of black and brown people in the US and those of the peoples of Africa, the Middle East and Central and South America.

Why are you portrayed as a rabid anti-Semite in the Western media?

In the American media which often becomes the world media, I am portrayed as anti-Semitic. As you know, the Semitic people are those closest to African and Asian cultural, linguistic and historical roots. So to be anti-Semitic, I would have to be anti-Arab as well as anti-Jew. I would be against members of my own racial family. And I'm not that.

What I am against is the type of relationship existing between some of the members of the Jewish community in America and the black community.

The Jewish people have been blessed with many prophets. Having been blessed with revelation, they are in a privileged position in that they have reason to be the head of any major discipline, not only in America but in the entire world. They are the leaders in law, in science, in medicine, in culture, in banking and now even politically-speaking they wield tremendous power. How this power is being utilised to deter, to diminish, to impede the progress of black people towards full liberation and economic emancipation is what worries me. Jews and blacks have worked together in America to break down the barriers of segregation and discrimination. Unfortunately, once the barriers are broken down, the members of the Jewish community have been in a much better position to take advantage of the situation than blacks have.

So we are pushing not to destroy the relationship between black and Jew, but to rearrange that relationship so that it is not one of master-slave, or manager-client, but one of reciprocity, one of justice and fairness. Unfortunately, when we point out inequities we perceive as injustices in the relationship, we are labelled anti-Semitic. That is unfortunate. We are trying to get a dialogue going between African Americans and the members of the Jewish community. But so far, that has not happened.

Islam has its own politics. For all the talk in America about my anti-Semitism, I do not hate Jews. The music teacher who taught me the violin was a Jew. He was a good man.

What I, and many of my people, find objectionable is the fact that Jews tend to have so much power disproportionate to their numbers. We, the African Americans have very little power. That seems to me to be most unfair. Why should the Jews control the media, the universities, arts and culture?

Why did Libya offer to pay $1 billion to the Nation of Islam?

Brother Muammar Gaddafi is a Muslim. He devised a new system of government. He is trying to evolve a system that allows the people to direct the course of Libyan affairs. It is not a parliamentary system as in the British system or the type of democracy we have in America.

The British and the Americans have a problem with him because of their former role in Libya. They resent the fact that when he ousted the British and the Americans from their bases on Libyan territory he nationalised Libya's oil industry. From that time on, the British and the Americans and many other Europeans who were exploiting Libya's riches have not liked Muammar Gaddafi.

He also used his tremendous oil wealth to raise the standard of living of millions of Libyans and poured money into the liberation struggle of the Palestinians, the Irish Republican Army, the Muslims in the Philippines and many liberation movements in Africa. They have also resented him for that. Gaddafi helped African revolutionaries who wanted to overthrow unjust and corrupt regimes. He is seen as an enemy, not of the American people, but of America's foreign policy objectives.

Gaddafi watched the Million Man March on television in which two million black men took part. He could see that the words I had told him were coming to pass. He was impressed. He called me, excited over what he was seeing, and promised to put the wealth of Libya behind the Nation of Islam and its programme for the elevation of blacks and Muslims and Native Americans.

I told Gaddafi that I am a revolutionary, but not with a gun and that I would create a revolution in America with the help of Allah, with the Qur'an. But the government of the US refused our petition to allow us to accept his offer.

That does not imply that the Nation of Islam in any way intends to involve itself in subversive activities inside America. Our work is the reform of our people. We must encourage our people to become economically productive. We want to change the realities under which our people live. And that $1 billion that Gaddafi might offer us will aid us particularly at a time when the US government, because of her tremendous debt, is cutting back on social, entitlement and welfare programmes.

We have people who have fought for America living in the streets and who are homeless. That effort on his part could be used by those of us who are skilled in investment and banking. These are the people to maximise the benefits for the masses of our people. It is unfortunate that politics get in the way of our receiving this help.

Private sector flying high

The government has finally taken a long-awaited step — the private sector can now take part in infrastructure projects. **Niveen Wahish** reports

The People's Assembly this week approved a new law allowing Egyptian and foreign private sector investors to take part in the establishment of infrastructural projects such as the construction, administration and operation of airports.

Minister of Transport Suleiman Metwalli said that the government will closely supervise any airports built as the result of this law, to ensure that they pose no threat to national security. He emphasised that the law gives the state complete sovereignty over its air space.

The law also allows private investors to operate the airports for a maximum of 99 years and bans the confiscation of the airports, equipment, and buildings of the operating company. In the meantime, the developers will have to maintain the airport, its equipment and furnishings, so that it can be transferred back to the government in good condition at the end of the agreed-upon operation period. The operator does not have the right to transfer operation to another operator without permission from the cabinet.\

Even before the law was passed, the government had announced its intention to build three new airports in the areas of Marsa Alam, on the southern Red Sea coast, El-Alamein, on the north coast and Dahab, in southwest Sinai, soliciting private sector participation in the establishment of these airports.

Bidding for the first of these airports, Marsa Alam, was closed late December with a Kuwaiti company, Mohamed Abdul-Mohsin Kharafi and Sons, chosen to negotiate for the contract.

The airport, which will be built on a build-own-transfer (BOT) basis, involves the construction of a terminal building, control tower and a three-kilometre-long runway. The operating period, according to the conditions of the contract, is 30 years, including a maximum of five years for construction. The contractor will operate all facilities, except the control tower, in return for an agreed upon percentage of annual profits.

The investor is to bear all costs of the airport's construction, including technical and financial studies, design, construction, equipment and maintenance.

Fikry Abdel-Wahab, a representative of the Kharafi group in Egypt, praised the Egyptian government's move to allow private sector investment in infrastructural projects as part of an overall plan to increase private investments, and ease the government's financial and administrative burdens.

Abdel-Wahab added that Kharafi bid for the Marsa Alam airport because they saw it as a very promising area, particularly for tourism-related projects.

According to Abdel-Wahab, the first phase of the airport, costing LE80 million, will be finished within three years of signing the contract.

The Kharafi group will also be free to develop approximately 15,000 sq km surrounding the airport. "This area will be used to build tourist villages, residential areas, commercial centres," said Abdel-Wahab.

The group is presently negotiating the terms of the contract with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). The 30 year operating period is among the points they are disputing. Kharafi would like the time frame expanded to 40 years. "Thirty years is not enough to regain the capital we will invest in the project," explained Abdel-Wahab.

Once they sign the contract, the Kuwaiti group will form a new company to carry out the construction of the airport. Kharafi will own 30 per cent of the new company, and 35 per cent will be owned by their local affiliates, EMAK Contracting Company and EMAK Real Estate Company.

According to the conditions of the contract, once the operation period is over, ownership of the airport, with all its furnishings and equipment, will be transferred to the CAA at no additional cost.

Additionally, the CAA will retain 25 per cent of the seats on the board of directors from the beginning.

Although discussions of the Marsa Alam airport are still in progress, the CAA has opened bidding for the El-Alamein airport. Bidding for Alamein is scheduled to close at the end of this month. Meanwhile, bidding on the Dahab airport, according to a CAA source, will begin in late January.

Kamal Naguib, aviation corespondent at *Al-Ahram* since 1938 and chairman of the World Aerospace Education Organisation, commended the government on its decision to allow the private sector to cooperate in establishing such vital projects as airports, saying that this decision will definitely relieve the government financially.

He commented that building an airport in Marsa Alam will trigger a flurry of activity in the area. "This area has great potential," Naguib said, explaining that, like Hurghada, its position on the Red Sea makes it attractive to investors.

"Although the area is not developed at the moment, in five years, when the airport is ready, it will be another place," Naguib said, further explaining that the airport will encourage those who already own land in the area, but have not used it, to set up projects.



● Location of Marsa Alam airport

The El-Alamein airport project on the other hand, Naguib said, should be put on hold. Recent government decisions to rehabilitate military airports and open them for civil use may negate the need for a new airport in the area. Borg El-Arab military airport, which might be rehabilitated in this manner, is not far from Alamein.

In addition, according to Naguib, this area is only active during the three summer months, when those who own summer homes in the villages along the coast, travel to the area, and "even then they use cars which are more practical."

He said that an airport in Alamein would only be profitable if plans to attract Europeans and other tourists to the area throughout the whole year accompanied it.

Ratings put Egypt in the investment limelight

Egypt has received its highest investment grade rating yet by an international agency from the US's Standard and Poor's

Egypt was graded, this week, a triple B-minus long-term and an A-minus 3 short-term foreign currency credit rating, along with an A-minus long-term and an A-minus 2 short-term local currency credit rating by the US Standard and Poor's (S&P), reports Niveen **Wahish**.

These ratings are affected by a number of factors, including the sound fiscal policy reflected in a government deficit of 1.3 per cent of GDP for fiscal years 1994/95 and 1995/96. This figure is targeted to be cut to 1.1 per cent during 1996/97. It also reflects a strong external liquidity. Egypt's central bank has reserves amounting to $19 billion which completely cover the Egyptian pounds in circulation and the banking system's foreign currency deposits.

According to the S&P report, Egypt's external debt service is equivalent to 17 per cent of its annual exports, which is relatively low compared to other countries with a similar rating.

Steady economic reform progress, including privatisation, trade liberalisation and deregulation, improved the rating. These structural adjustments are expected to secure faster economic growth, increased investments and national savings and strengthen the government's financial standing.

On the other hand, the rating has been negatively affected by a number of factors. Among these are Egypt's low annual per capita income, which is approximately $1,200, a weak social infrastructure and a moderate local debt burden of 53 per cent of GDP estimated for fiscal year 1996/97.

Additionally, the rating was affected by a weak financial sector, a low savings and investment ratio equaling 17 per cent of GDP, a dependence of export earnings on oil and tourism revenues, as well as remittances.

The S&P report was one of the primary issues discussed during President Hosni Mubarak's meeting with the President's Council on Sunday.

After reviewing the report, Mubarak commented that it classifies Egypt as an investment-attractive country. It also places the nation, for the first time, in a better position than many Latin American countries and puts it on equal footing with the Asian industrial countries.

He also explained that following the circulation of this report, the investment flow into Egypt is expected to increase by $1.5 to $2 billion annually.

Mubarak stressed that receiving such a rating requires a change in Egypt's financial and monetary policies, as it will mean increased foreign demand on the country's shares and bonds. The president demanded that all financial institutions, particularly insurance companies and the capital market, take measures to meet the requirements of the coming period.

During his meeting with the council, the president also reviewed the reports written by internal committees formed by the council.

He called for the formation of working groups, to be comprised of concerned ministers and businessmen, whose job it would be to monitor the development of the communications sector and financial and monetary institutions, specifically insurance companies and the capital market.

Evaluating the importance of the S&P rating, Mohamed Ozalp, senior general manager of MI-Bank and member of the President's Council, stated that this rating is an international recognition of Egypt's increasing financial strength. "It recognises the soundness of the Egyptian economy," he said.

Ozalp explained that the Egypt's grade signifies strong investment possibilities to international financiers. It puts Egypt in a better position than several other countries, including India, the Philippines and Argentina, and places it on equal footing with Greece and China.

It is not just a grading of the economy, but also of the political situation, "we are recognised as a stable investment country," he explained.

According to Ozalp, not only does it make Egypt more attractive to investors, but it also means that the nation can borrow money at a lower interest rate, due to its placement in a lower risk category.

This grading also makes investment decisions by international companies easier. Previous ratings, by Moody's Investors Service and Thomson Bank Watch, both of the US, were not, according to Ozalp, adequate evaluations.

Unlike previous ratings, the S&P evaluation was solicited by the government.

Free shops for sale

AS PART of the government's plan to privatise about 50 state-owned companies this year, two holding companies floated a minority of their shareholdings in two of their subsidiaries last week. The first, the Holding Company for Housing, Cinema and Tourism has offered 1.05 million shares of its subsidary Egypt Free Shops (EFS) for sale through public subscription.

The offer, which amounts to 30 per cent of EFS equity, is to be equally distributed between individual investors, financial institutions and the Employee Shareholders Association. The shares were offered at a minimum price of LE32. EFS posted a net after tax profit of LE13.4 million for the fiscal year 1995-1996.

Cotton and International Trade has also invited investors to bid for 20 per cent, or more, of its holdings in the Nile Ginning Company. The offer includes 1.2 million shares to be sold at a minimum price of LE42 and in minimum lots of 10,000 shares.

Share prices for the two offers will be subject to increase if demand exceeds the lots on offer. If 51 per cent or more of either company were to be sold, then its legal status would change, and the company would become subject to Law 159 of 1981.

Privatisation proceeds

TOTAL proceeds from the sale of public sector companies over the last four years hit LE3.658 billion, according to Public Sector Minister Atef Ebeid.

Ebeid explained that LE1.878 million was allocated to pay the debts of public companies to the National Investment Bank and other major public banks, while LE19 million will pay taxes on capital profits. A further LE152 million was paid as "early retirement" compensation for laid-off public sector employees. The remaining LE1.609 billion was deposited in the Central Bank of Egypt by holding companies.

Addressing the Industrial Committee of the People's Assembly last week, Ebeid reviewed government efforts in selling public companies at higher prices to investors who are capable of upgrading and raising their competitive advantages in local and foreign markets.

The minister stressed that the "Luxor Group" which bought Al-Ahram Beverages has promised to invest LE100 million in modernising the company.

Doors close against mad cows

A ban on meat imports from Britain has been expanded to include four European countries as of 12 January 1997. **Mona El-Fiqi** and **Gamal Essam El-Din** report

Government authorities have implemented stringent restrictions on the import of cattle following recently released reports from the Organisation of International Epidemics (OIE) indicating that cattle from a number of European countries are infected with Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis (BSE) or mad cow disease.

Agriculture Minister Youssef Wali issued a decree, on 12 January, banning the import of live cattle, meat and meat by-products from five EU nations. Wali declared last week that standards regarding the importation of meat and cattle will be up for reconsideration biannually in accordance with current OIE guidelines. The prohibition, the successor of an existing ban on British imports, has been enlarged to include France, Ireland, Portugal and Switzerland.

A ban on meat imports from Britain has been in force since 1990. But as fear of the disease escalated, the original boycott was expanded in March of last year to cover all meat originating from Europe.

But, according to the minister of supply and trade, Ahmed Guweili, the embargo was adjusted one month later when official reports from the World Health Organisation(WHO) and the OIE emphasised that European countries, excepting Britain, were free of the disease.

"The cabinet decided in April 1996, to restrict the embargo to England, but, nevertheless, imposed strict conditions on the importation of meat from the European Union," said Guweili.

But, rumours concerning new shipments of contaminated meat have compelled officials to assure the public of the efficacy of government measures to protect consumers from imported meat infected with BSE.

Hussein Mohamed Hussein, head of the Food Imports Department at the General Authority for Imports and Exports Control, said that stipulations within the decree are designed to guarantee that certain conditions applied to countries not included in the ban are met.

According to the new rules, cattle imports are prevented from entry unless they are accompanied by certificates of origin and documents from veterinary authorities in the exporting country proving that they are free of disease. An additional requirement specifies that the shipments should be transported directly from the country of origin to Egyptian ports to prevent the importation of meat from banned countries.

Hussein emphasised that there are three government departments in charge of permitting the entry of imported meat and cattle; the Imports and Exports Control Authority, the Ministry of Health and the Veterinary Medical Authority (VMA). "If only one of these departments has doubts about the quality, the shipment is refused," Hussein added.

Raouf Azmi, general manager of the Animal Products Department at the Ministry of Supply and Trade, said that the main reason for the controversy over meat shipments resulted from an importer who had received approval for a cattle shipment from Ireland prior to the prohibition announced last March. But Azmi noted, "The shipment did not enter the country as the ban came into force on the day of its issue."

The possibility of contaminated meat entering the country was one of the main topics of discussion at the People's Assembly last week.

Journalist Ayman Nour, a Wafdist deputy for the Cairo district of Bab El-Shaariya, accused the VMA, which is affiliated to the Ministry of Agriculture, of releasing a permit, in December, for a shipment of meat from southern Ireland to enter the country. The permission was granted, Nour charged, despite the fact that the OIC had issued a warning against importing meat from southern Ireland because it believes cattle originating there are infected with BSE.

"The VMA gave its permission for the importation of meat from southern Ireland on 30 December although the OIC's reports were issued 20 December," said Nour.

He also criticised the decree issued by Agriculture Minister Youssef Wali. "This decree was too late because it was issued a long time after the release of OIC's report. During that time quantities of meat were imported with the VMA's permission," said Nour.

As a result, Nour added, a consignment of 350,000 infected cows was permitted into the country by the Alexandria Port Authority (APA), two days after Wali's decree was released.

Even worse, he added, other ships carrying more than 14,000 infected cows from southern Ireland are now on their way to Alexandria and Port Said."

Another ship, coming from Florida in the United States, is now reportedly heading for Egypt with a consignment of 4,000 tons of meat from cows slaughtered in Kansas farms and exported as disease-free meat. Although the liver of these cows has been rejected by Russia, it is not clear whether the meat will be permitted into Egypt or not, Nour said.

The minister of supply and trade, Guweili denied the allegations pointing to the provisions for, "stricter measures, including requirements such as a certificate of origin authenticated by the importing country and the Egyptian Embassy accompanied by a certificate from the concerned agencies stating that the consignment of meat is free from all epidemic diseases, especially BSE". Besides, Guweili added, the ministry conducted a full screening of all animal fodder to ensure they were free from the agents that cause the disease.

According to Guweili, most of Egyptian meat imports are from "dairy animals" and not "meat animals". "This is why we are not importing meat from southern Ireland, because cows there are fattened to be meat animals," said Guweili.

In a serious attempt to reduce meat imports, Guweili revealed, the government has recently allocated LE200 million to revive the old *bitelo* or "calf-rearing" project to meet local needs with safe and less expensive meat.

At the end of the debate, Guweili indicated that the ministry is monitoring the ship coming from Florida. "It has not reached Egypt yet, and I think it will not arrive in Egypt at all," he added.

Market report

GMI upward bound

General Market Index for the week ending 16 January

330
320
310
300
12/1/97 13/1/97 14/1/97 15/1/97 16/1/97

THE GENERAL Market Index, continuing its upward trend, witnessed a slight increase during the week ending 16 January. It gained 0.14 points to close at just over 324 points. The overall performance of the market was reliable, with four out of its five indices gaining momentum during the week. Meanwhile, the volume of transactions reached LE261 million compared to LE272 during the previous week.

Shares of United and Arab Spinning and Weaving (Unirab) lead the market as it floated 10 per cent of its shares during the week. It cornered 35.76 per cent of the overall value of market transactions as 93 million pound's worth of its shares changed hands. Likewise, Unirab acquired the biggest share of the market turnover in terms of the number of traded shares. The company traded a total of 1.24 million shares, 39 per cent of the total market activity. Nevertheless, it lost LE9.4 to close at LE76.

The market's biggest overall gainer was the Egypt-Saudi Finance Bank as it had the highest increase in share value to close at LE27, a 50 per cent increase.

The 13.17 per cent decline in share value of Heliopolis Housing and Urbanisation (HHU) caused much consternation. The slide, bringing the company's share value down to LE471 at week's end, was the sharpest in the market. It represented a shift in the lengthy upward trend of HHU shares which in the past six months have soared by nearly 1,100 per cent.

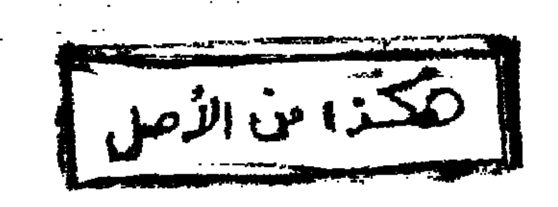
Meanwhile, the unjustified increase in the share value of National Societée Generale Bank has prompted the Capital Market Authority to suspend the bank's share transactions. The shares had reached LE775 compared to LE590 two months ago. Market analysts attributed the increase to the price juggling in the market that had become widespread after the signing of cross-listing deals between the Egyptian, Kuwaiti and Bahraini stock exchanges.

The financial sector had, as a whole, a less than inspiring week with its index losing 20 points to end at 496. The share value of Commercial International Bank (CIB) ended at its opening price of LE600 despite having changed hands through 99 transactions.

The value of bond transactions accounted for a marginal 0.04 per cent of the overall market activity.

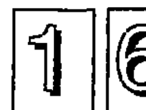
In general, 43 companies out of the 106 being traded through the week recorded gains, 31 lost while the remaining 32 companies closed at their opening prices.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

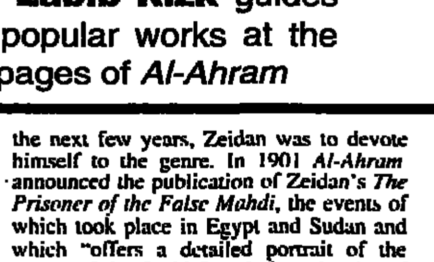


هكذا من الأصل

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life




Al-Ahram had a part to play in bringing works of literature, history, travel and philosophy to the attention of the reading public, through its policy of "commending" publications. This, the newspaper insisted, did not imply a recommendation or otherwise of the work in question. In this episode of his *Diwan*, **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** guides us through some of the popular works at the time as seen through the pages of *Al-Ahram*



"Commending publications" was the headline of a lengthy letter that appeared on the front page of *Al-Ahram* on 31 December 1901. The letter, signed, "Sincerely, Mohamed Amin at the Ministry of Public Works," opened a new chapter in the history of the newspaper's dealings with newly-published literary works.

In his letter, Amin denounces the daily newspapers for "lavishing praise on some literary works, generally on the very day they arrive in their offices. Most intelligent people are dissatisfied with this practice and would rather that our newspapers followed the practice of Western newspapers, which do not praise a new publication unless they have made themselves totally familiar with it."

Expressing its approval of this reader's letter, *Al-Ahram* recounted its difficulties with some authors. On one occasion, it recalls, its criticism of an author's work turned life at the newspaper's offices upside down. "It was as though we had nothing better to do in our working day than to meet the censorious friends of the author and to search our souls for that heinous error we committed. Yet never once did anyone tell us that our criticism was wrong. On the contrary, they admitted it was correct, but they added, 'He's an important and famous man. He's your friend. All the other newspapers wrote wonderful things about him. So why do you have to antagonise him without cause?'" *Al-Ahram* hit upon the solution: a "commendation".

"It offers neither praise nor criticism. Rather it is much like a simple advertisement telling the reader its general subject, the price and where it might be purchased," *Al-Ahram* explained. Poetry, novels, philosophy, education, geography, medicine, history, economy, sciences, art, human rights, not to mention school books, are some of the subject areas of the many new publications *Al-Ahram* would "commend" to its readers. In what constituted the precursor of *Al-Ahram*'s literary supplement we find a detailed indication of the directions of intellectual and literary activity in Egypt at the turn of the century.

At that time, collections of maxims, adages and popular proverbs became popular, not only for their edifying content but, perhaps, because the search for a national identity had gained intensity under British occupation. Two such works commended by *Al-Ahram* were *Strands of Pearls of Wisdom*, "a finely compiled work of illuminating benefit at the cost of only four piastres" and *Popular Proverbs in Egypt and Syria* by Naoum Shaqir.

Poetry, of course, as the oldest and most refined literary genre, would always have broad appeal. Of particular interest in light of the spread of education are those works that offered readers insight into literary appreciation. In this context, we note "*The Complete Table of Poetic Metre and Rhyme* by Mohamed Effendi Helmi" and "*The History of Arabic Literature*, in which the author, Mohamed Bek Diyab, has applied European methodology in the classification of literature to provide a comprehensive description of the development of Arabic literature over the various historical ages. We highly commend this book which contributes to refining the minds of publishers and honing the talents of poets."

The novel form, by contrast, had only just begun to be introduced into the body of Arabic literature. While the majority of works advertised in *Al-Ahram* were Arabic translations or Arabised foreign novels, several items suggest that the art of the Arabic novel was already beginning to take hold. Thus we have, for example, *El-Hajjaj* by Ahmed Effendi El-Shahidi, published in 1895 which "is based on the life of the illustrious El-Hajjaj, who attained prominent status in the age of the Caliph Abdel-Malek Ibn Mirwan. The harmony and eloquence of this work leads us to believe that it will be very well received by the reading public." The newspaper also seemed particularly impressed by two other novels. The first was *The Most Important of Men* by Zaki Effendi Baru which it described as "a romantic adventure novel about a man who travelled around the world and described the various countries and their people." The second was a historical novel by Abdallah Fikri called *Distress and Sorrow under Napoleon's Invasion of Egypt*, described by *Al-Ahram* as "emotive, dramatic, humorous, subtly sensitive and poetic. It consists of five chapters and costs 5 piastres."

At the forefront of the Egyptian historical novel genre was Jurji Zeidan. *Al-Ahram* first introduces its readers to this prolific author on 2 March 1892, by which time he already had seven books in print. Of these works, only one, *The Rebellious Mamluke*, was a novel, but over the next few years, Zeidan was to devote himself to the genre. In 1901 *Al-Ahram* announced the publication of Zeidan's *The Prisoner of the False Mahdi*, the events of which took place in Egypt and Sudan and which "offers a detailed portrait of the events of the Orabi Revolution, the rise of the Mahdi and the customs of the Egyptians, Syrians and Sudanese."

Women's issues made another contribution to the literary output of the age. *Women and their Status from the Age of the Prophet Until the Present* by Ali Effendi Al-Shahidi discussed issues such as marriage, the veil and equality of women. In his attempt to argue the inferior status of women, the author "cited both psychological and medical evidence which is of considerable interest to the reader." Given the timing of this publication, one assumes that it appeared in response to Qasim Amin's *The Emancipation of Women* and *The Contemporary Woman* which had stirred much heated controversy. The latter work appeared only two months before Shahidi's book. One also suspects that Shahidi or his publisher paid for their own advertisement in *Al-Ahram* since his work conflicts with their known support for the ideas of Qasem Amin.

Among the books on geography and travel writings 'commended' in *Al-Ahram* was *Explicit Proof of the Virtues and Benefits of Helwan* by Ahmed Effendi Abdel-Aziz. In this book, the author praises Helwan's "excellent accommodation, the purity of its air and the ease of travel to and from it." A more scholarly work in this field appears to be that of Ismail Effendi Ali, whose work, The *Al-Azhar Elite in Global Cartography* evoked rare *Al-Ahram* praise. "We know of no other work in Arabic that is as comprehensive in this domain except perhaps the volume that was published in the era of Klot Bek." Particularly germane to the last decade of the 19th century was *The New Geography of Egypt and the Sudan*. The book, written in English and published in London, "holds great benefit for the reader for the new information it provides on the natural, political and economic geography of Egypt and the Sudan."

The pages of *Al-Ahram* were also a place where the reading public could acquaint itself with those authors who were later to become prominent political figures.

Of particular note was the Egyptian nationalist leader Mustafa Kamel, whose book *The Oriental Question* already indicated his commitment to the nationalist cause and perhaps gave some indication of his future political course. *Al-Ahram* was particularly impressed by this work and in its 18 June 1898 edition accorded it an unusually lengthy review in light of its policy of short "commendations". The author of the review was particularly astonished that "this author, who had so little spare time, could find the time to compose this invaluable work gathering together every important issue related to the Oriental question and organising it into a very readable and cohesively structured presentation." The book, the review continued, treated numerous themes, including the British occupation of Egypt, through which "the British thought they had reached their highest aspirations in the region by gaining a foothold in the Nile valley and what constitutes the cornerstone of the Islamic caliphate and the Ottoman empire, although there can be no doubt that their enterprise in Egypt is doomed to failure sooner or later." It also discussed the conflict between Egypt and the Ottoman state in the age of Mohamed Ali which, in the view of the author, "ultimately wrought disaster both to Egypt and to the Supreme Porte." Thirdly, it discussed the Orabi revolution which, in the view of the author, "created the opening for the brokers of evil and corruption to enter Egypt." Although the writer of the review admittedly did not agree with all of Mustafa Kamel's views, he found that the book "stirred passions which may be wiser to quell" and that "it exposed all of the ills of the Ottoman state with the exception of its major ill, its domestic situation."

Al-Ahram of 16 April 1894 featured the book of another future nationalist leader, "Mohamed Bek Farid, a deputy prosecutor in the national courts and a member of the Geographical Society." His book, *The History of the Ottoman Empire* "covers Ottoman history from its founder Al-Ghazi Othman Khan until the present day. In only 500 pages it covers this subject in profound detail, yet with the ease of a novelist."

Ahmed Shafiq was one of the most important figures of the late 19th century, if not for his direct political influence, then, as a palace confidant, a role which gave him insight into the inner life of the royal court. *Al-Ahram* was particularly interested in Shafiq's *Slavery in Islam*. The book, intended as a response to the accusations of orientalists, gave a background to the institution of slavery from the ancient Pharaonic, Chinese, Persian and Assyrian civilisations to medieval Europe. It then discussed "the laws which civilised nations have instituted in order to curb this practice" and finally "the situation of slavery in Islam, including the injunctions on the treatment and freeing of slaves and much other useful information."

The newspaper also featured two of the most prominent historians of the age. Indeed, Mikhail Sharubim and Ismail Sirhank remain a primary resource for scholars to this day and were the subject of a recent study on 19th century Egyptian historians published in 1984 by the American scholar, Jack Krupps Jr. Sharubim came to the attention of *Al-Ahram* 90 years ago with his *Complete Compendium to Ancient and Modern Egyptian History*, "a splendid, smoothly organised work which reflects the high erudition and scholastic precision of its author who has offered the reading public a gift to be cherished." As for Sirhank, the newspaper announced the publication of the second volume of *The Facts and Discoveries of Famous Nations*, in which "this intelligent author discusses every important detail of the history of ancient and modern Egypt from the age of the pharaohs to the present day."

Another important person to be introduced to the public through the pages of *Al-Ahram* was Ahmed Fathi Zaghlul, the brother of the famous Egyptian nationalist leader Saad Zaghlul. On 17 August 1895 we find a notice about this author's "invaluable thesis," *The Forgery of Documents*, which he dedicated to his brother who was a judge in the National Court of Appeals at the time. Several years later, on 20 April 1898, the newspaper announced the publication of Fathi Zaghlul's *Islam* "reflecting the author's well-known erudition, scholasticism and linguistic eloquence." And before the year was out, we find a notice of another book by this author, *The Secret of Anglo-Saxon Supremacy*.

The latter half of the 19th century was also a time of prolific translation into Arabic. Of particular note was the newspaper's announcement of the translation of Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* translated into Arabic by Hafez Ibrahim. So impressed was the newspaper that it commented: "If only there were a school to produce translators into Arabic of this standard so that the general public could glean the noblest of ideas through the most eloquent devices of Arabic writing."

Although not as profuse, there was a certain amount of translation from Arabic into other languages, notably French. *Al-Ahram* announced the publication of the translation into French of "some poems by Al-Mutanabbi Ibn Al-Farid" by Abdel Khaleq Bek Tharwat and M. Ferdinand de Martino. The translations, however, were not a success and in response to criticism, *Al-Ahram* wrote that, "Abdel-Khaleq Tharwat has said that de Martino misconstrued his explanations of some of the words and therefore failed to convey the proper sense in French," while de Martino pleaded, "I do not pretend to be an expert in the Arabic language. However, my friend Abdel-Khaleq Tharwat gave me to understand certain things and this is what was produced in French." Needless to say, *Al-Ahram* could not predict that Abdel-Khaleq Tharwat would become Egypt's prime minister in 20 years time. Otherwise it might have heeded its own counsel and followed its own policy of commending books without praise or censure.



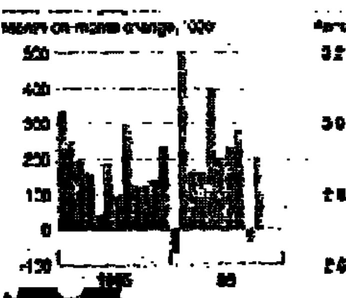
The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

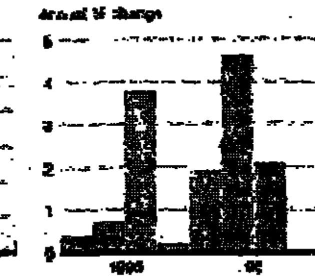
World Bank to participate in New Valley project

YOUSSEF Wali, deputy prime minister and minister of agriculture met with a delegation from the World Bank, currently visiting Cairo and headed by the Bank's vice-president, to discuss the possibility of the Bank's participation in the New Valley project.

The project, one of the country's most ambitious, includes irrigating some 500,000 acres in the Western Desert with water from the Nile, in the hopes of establishing new communities within the area.

Wali stated that he received an official letter from the World Bank in which the Bank proposed to take part in the New Valley project through providing assistance on the technical level, such as conducting field studies or through financing the initial works of the project.





Money & Business

Promoting Egyptian exports

PETER Gopfrich, executive director of the German-Arab Chamber of Commerce in Cairo, announced that a major conference will be held in Germany to promote international investment in Egypt as well as Egyptian exports to Europe. Participating in the conference will be a large number of Egyptian and German businessmen and government officials who will share in organising an industrial federation between the two countries. The conference's aim is to boost Egypt's image on the international level as a developing industrial nation.

Gopfrich explained that the chamber takes an active role in promoting Egyptian-German ties. Among the goals of the the chamber for the current year is establishing a training programme for Egyptians from both the private and public business sectors.

NBE extends up-to-date services

THE NATIONAL Bank of Egypt (NBE), the premier Egyptian bank, plays a pioneering role in developing and stimulating the capital market via extending all relevant financial services. The bank's endeavours in this respect help courting foreign as well as domestic investments, especially as the Egyptian capital market is considered one of the most eminent emerging markets worldwide. Consequently, NBE has expanded the scope of its sub-custodian services to include:

1: Trade settlement via SWIFT or fax within 48 hours after receipt of securities.

2: Share registration in the name of the beneficial owner, with the preparation of the related statements indicating full description of trade concluded.

3: Income collection: the custodian's cash account is credited by the income proceeds on the value date of collection.

4: Cash management via opening two cash accounts for the customer, one in Egyptian pounds, and the other in US dollars to record all trades concluded. Cash statements are sent on the second business day of each month.

5: Customer liaison, where inquiries are answered within 48 hours. An English-speaking member of staff is always available from 8.30am to 2.00pm (local time).

6: Proxy voting in general meetings in accordance with the customer's request.

7: Foreign exchange services according to market rates.

8: Providing the following periodic reports:

a- Failed trade report (weekly)

b- Trade confirmation (within 48 hours)

c- Dividends due (after coupon collection)

d- Securities statement

e- Cash statement

Furthermore, NBE has recently obtained the approval of the Capital Market Authority to conduct the services of bookkeeping. This highlights the fact that the bank extends traditional and non-traditional banking services by breaking through untrodden fields, thus laying the basis for a sound and efficient economy.

IBM: Patent design and research

IN AN interview with Hisham El-Shishini of IBM, he discussed the company's research and design operations, saying that the establishment of the research unit of IBM International over 50 years ago has greatly contributed to the company's success in data technology, making it the most well-known name in the field. It is worth mentioning that IBM is is one of the main sponsors of the 5th Al-Ahram Computer and Information Technology Exhibition, to be held 28 February to 2 March 1996 at the Semiramis Intercontinental Hotel.

Since 1995, IBM has spent more than $6 billion alone on research and development. This resulted in a large number of patents registered in the United States, which in 1996 reached 1876.

El-Shishini added that thought and creativity of its scientists allowed IBM to develop a number of the company's best-known applications in the area of data technology, such as:

— High temperature superconductivity: Two researchers working IBM's Zurich laboratory made this discovery and consequently won the Nobel Prize in 1987. The discovery involved new materials which conduct electricity without resistance, maintaining a high temperature. This discovery is being used in geophysical drilling and advanced medical diagnostics.

— Scanning tunnelling microscope: This revolutionary microscope was patented by two researchers in IBM's Zurich laboratory, which earned them a Nobel Prize in 1986. This microscope provides a view of the surface of materials at the atomic level.

— Relational databases: Arranges databases in a relational form rather than the form which previously prevailed, the hierarchical form. This discovery was made by one of IBM's researchers at the company's San Jose Laboratory in the United States in 1970. Today, relational databases have become the most widely-used kind in the world.

— Magnetic storage disks (RAMAC): In 1956, IBM made a revolutionary discovery in the computer field by introducing the first magnetic storage disk, first used on the RAMAC 305 computer developed by IBM's San Jose laboratory.

— One-device memory cell: Known as DRAM today, this was originally patented as a one-device memory cell by researchers at IBM's Thomas Watson Research Laboratory in the United States in the late 1960s.

— RISC (reduced instruction set computer) architecture: This technology was developed in 1975 at IBM's Thomas Watson Research Laboratory,and is currently used at the global level.

— FORTRAN (formula translation): FORTRAN was the first high-level computer language developed in 1957 by a team of IBM researchers. Today, even after 40 years, FORTRAN is still considered the language of choice for engineers and scientists.

— Speech recognition: IBM is a pioneering company in the specialised field, whereby it has developed the technology to include a number of languages, including Arabic, which IBM's Egyptian branch developed.

These are but a few examples of the hundreds of patents which IBM has made in the field of data technology.

ZEIN

ALI - AL AHRAM

A settlement harsher than war

The peace process has been stretched this way and that, writes **Gamil Matar**. Yet this is only the beginning

Hardly an hour after the signing of the Hebron protocol, statements praising and endorsing it were flooding in from capitals across the world. The press and politicians heaped praise on the protocol. Some of this outburst of joy was sincere; more often, however, it merely reflected a desire to rearrange the cards in the Middle East game. It seems, however, that no one other than the principal negotiators themselves, has read the text which is mistakenly described as a protocol.

International jubilation over the peace process is nothing new. The celebrations, however, have surpassed the usual limits this time: the Hebron agreement deserves more profound consideration if we are to assess its significance for the future of both Palestine and the Zionist state.

According to Labour's Ehud Barak, Netanyahu is an asset to the peace process. Certain Arab writers, and many Westerners, have said so. But most important to the celebrants was that the peace process is back on track. In fact, what is important is the loss of respect for true peace. This is a grave situation, especially if we take into account the agreements that have already been signed by the two parties. Hopes for a just peace have been dashed, and the idea of a true and honourable peace has no more credibility.

Proof of this lies in the replies made by Netanyahu and other commentators to the extreme right-wing opposition in Israel. So far, however, the text of the document signed by Arafat and Netanyahu has not been published. When the agreement is made public, we may find that the damage is even greater than we thought. Still, the examples below suffice to indicate that the jubilant mood prevailing is at best unfounded — at least as far as the Palestinians are concerned.

Bar Eilan, Likud leader and Netanyahu supporter, has declared that, in the coming year, the Palestinians will not receive any land, contrary to what they might think.

Netanyahu and others are on record as having said that Israel is not committed to involving the Palestinians in determining the area of land on which the self-rule authority will be established. In other words, the final negotiations will remain, in essence, purely an exercise to be undertaken by Israel alone, in which neither the Palestinians nor any other party will have a say. This decision, taken unilaterally by Israel, has been approved by the US.

In the most recent phase of negotiations, Israel managed to establish the basis for the behaviour of the two parties in the coming stage of negotiations. According to the unequal peace equation it has devised, Israel will fulfil no commitments, including the promises it made with respect to Palestinian prisoners, the return of land, the opening of borders or the establishment of corridors — indeed, any of the commitments referred to in Madrid, Oslo, Cairo or Taba — until the Palestinians present a certificate of good behaviour — as defined, of course, by Israel. Israel's definition of "good behaviour" precludes demonstrations, even if these are held against Arafat's will, in reaction to the arrest of Palestinian leaders or the killing of young Palestinians. Almost anything, in fact, is sufficient to exonerate Israel from its commitments.

Netanyahu argues that the Hebron protocol is more advantageous for Israel than was the Oslo Accord. This statement should suffice to refute the arguments of some Arab analysts that this is a non-zero sum game, in other words, that all the parties to the agreement can win. But the ever-jubilant entourage is overwhelmed with joy whenever Arab rights are compromised and Israeli intransigence is rewarded yet again. Secure in their belief that their own good-will shall spread like a flood throughout the entire region, some suggest that we should shower Israel with compromises.

Hebron is the real international and regional test of Israel's intention to lay the foundations for peaceful coexistence with the Palestinians. While Netanyahu may have succeeded in providing 400 American settlers in Hebron with greater guarantees of security, he has failed to provide 150,000 Palestinians with the opportunity to prove that. for more than one reason, they were ready to provide the settlers with more effective guarantees than those which Netanyahu and the US have imposed on Arafat.

Netanyahu firmly declared that the Hebron agreement was in many ways an improvement on Oslo. In other words, he and those Labour Party members who voted in support of this "improvement" implicitly believe that the agreements concluded with the Arabs are subject to interpretation and "improvement", as well as to deletion or cancellation. The international community received the Oslo Accords with much the same jubilation and merrymaking; at the time, they were considered the greatest of all steps in the peace process.

According to Israel, Oslo was supposed to replace the texts of the Madrid agreement and other international resolutions in favour of the Palestinians, which the international community has been issuing for over half a century. Less than four years after the signing of the Oslo agreement, and two years after the conclusion of Oslo II in Taba, Israel has decided to introduce its own improvements to both agreements. Thus modified, the deals will better serve Israeli interests and further undermine Palestinian rights, and Israel will continue to argue that the new and improved versions are truly conducive to real peace.

Netanyahu and his military commanders, politicians and commentators have repeatedly asserted that the agreements do not commit the Israeli army to redeploying its forces outside Hebron, but only within the city. This is tantamount to saying that Israel has not and will not implement Oslo, and that the Hebron protocol is a new instrument which abrogates the legitimacy of the Oslo Accord. According to the new agreement, the Israeli forces are permitted to remain in Hebron: their presence is in no way dependent on the final phase of the negotiations and its implications for the future of the West Bank. Netanyahu, after all, has pledged to promote and consolidate Israel's presence in Hebron forever, and asserted that the Ibrahimi shrine will remain in the possession of Israel alone.

Netanyahu had demanded that the deployment and withdrawal of Israeli forces be postponed until 1999, but the Palestinians refused. The Americans thereupon proposed a one-year cut on the delay, thereby flouting the legal date; as a result, the redeployment will take place in 1998, according to Israel's decision and at its convenience. All the parties agreed to Israel's terms and manifestations of jubilation abounded, regardless of the endless international, Arab and Palestinian compromises on the essence and outcome of peace in the region — regardless, also, of the nose-diving credibility of the Arab negotiators themselves.

Netanyahu's "metamorphosis" is already being celebrated; awed, his supporters whisper that he has been transformed from within, renouncing his extreme Zionist convictions and joining hands with the advocates of peace. On the other hand, the Zionist fanatics, particularly the Americans, are vehement in their accusations that Netanyahu is a traitor, that he has reneged on the promises he made to get himself elected.

Netanyahu will soon set his price, faithful to the precedent he has established; this will be paid in part by the Americans, but by the Arabs too. He may request an improvement of his image in the international media; he may demand that renewed pressure be exerted in persuading Egypt to change its policy towards his intransigence and racism and to refrain from any intervention in Palestinian-Israeli matters, unless called upon to do so by Israel. In other words, Egypt may well be asked not to intervene unless Israel wishes it to do so.

A few months from now, peace efforts may be resumed, and the coalition government may include Labour members, since it has been amply proven that, in terms of final goals, Labour and Likud are identical. The implications of peace as spelled out in the statements of Labour leaders during and after the Knesset debates reveal that the difference between the two parties is essentially focused on means, not ends. In other words, the difference resides in the form of the peace process, the rapidity of its implementation and the way in which other details of no material significance are to be worked out.

In the past few months, the map showing the areas which will be ceded to Palestinian self rule has been completed. The final map will certainly require the political consensus of domestic forces. It will give rise to divisions and disputes, crises and problems between Arab countries, and will ultimately constrain the effectiveness of an Egyptian role, isolate the Palestinian leadership and undermine the Syrian regime.

The coming two years may prove to be the most critical in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The years of settlement have been harder than most of the years of conflict which preceded the peace negotiations. We have never been closer to the climax of the settlement, which itself is the climax of the conflict. The manoeuvres and battles which took place during the negotiations for redeployment in Hebron, and the outcome in terms of the Palestinians' rights, are only a first step, and give scant indication of what lies ahead.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Hurdle race

For more than three years, Palestinians and Israelis have been bargaining and haggling to hammer out terms of a peaceful coexistence which remains elusive despite all the partial agreements reached.

It has been a race of many hurdles, with Israel planting new obstacles as soon as existing ones are overcome. It will take Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and his aides all the patience in the world and all the lessons and help they can get from Egypt, to steer negotiations with Israel through the remaining stages of redeployment, the final status of the Palestinian territories and the related problems of refugees and Jewish settlers.

Hebron was merely a foretaste of things to come in Arafat's dealings with a Likud government headed by Binyamin Netanyahu, a hawk under pressure from extremist religious zealots.

Egypt has been through two major bouts of bargaining with Israel. The first, under the late President Anwar Sadat, was between the time he took his history-making trip to Jerusalem in November 1977, and the signing of a peace treaty with Israel in March 1979. The second, deftly and patiently handled by President Hosni Mubarak, lasted for seven whole years, from 1982 to 1989, and ended eventually with Egypt regaining control of the one-square-kilometre Taba enclave in eastern Sinai at the tip of the Gulf of Aqaba.

Thus, Egypt acquired a great wealth of experience in doing business with Israel at the negotiating table. It is this experience that has already helped Arafat significantly in his quest for a Hebron redeployment agreement. And he will need even more of this wisdom in the coming stages — the new redeployment, which Arafat hopes will enable him to control more than 90 per cent of the Palestinian territories, and the final status negotiations, which he envisions as a stepping stone to statehood.

There is a difference now on the Israeli side, though. The Likud government, headed by the late Menachem Begin that dealt with Sadat, and the Labour regime, which did business with Mubarak later, kept their word and honoured signed accords. Netanyahu is a different story. Apart from considerable foot-dragging, he has tried repeatedly — and occasionally managed — to amend provisions of the Oslo and subsequent agreements with the Palestinians insofar as redeployment in Hebron was concerned.

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Netanyahu after Hebron

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed believes that the signing of the Hebron agreement has ushered in a new chapter in Palestinian-Israeli relations

There is no doubt that the agreement on Hebron has been the subject of Palestinian and Arab criticism and reservations, if only because it forces yet more concessions from the Palestinians than those already wrung from them under the agreements they concluded with the previous Labour government. Unlike the earlier agreements, the new agreement concedes a permanent Jewish presence in Hebron, with all the military support this will entail. The agreement has been just as controversial from the Israeli point of view, although it has provoked problems of a different nature.

The most striking problem in this respect is that the agreement has been more sharply criticised by elements within the ruling coalition government than by the opposition parties in Israel. In fact, the only Knesset members who voted against the agreement were supporters of the present Likud government. This has introduced an entirely new factor in the Israeli power structure, with parties in the opposition supporting the agreement despite their traditional stance of systematically opposing government policy, and a cabinet minister, namely, Menachim Begin's son Benny Begin, resigning in protest at the agreement, thus inheriting Netanyahu's mantle as leader of the extreme right-wing opposition to official Israeli policy.

Netanyahu's future is now dependent on the opposition parties in the Knesset, which have the power to bring down his government. The largest of these, the Labour Party, is the key factor in determining the course of Israeli politics. Two antipodal scenarios can be envisaged in this respect: one in which the leaders of the Labour Party 'exploit' the rebellion in the ranks of the ruling coalition to bring down the government through a vote of no-confidence in the Knesset, thus bringing to the fore the sharp divide within Israeli society over the peace process and forcing the parties to dissipate any ambiguity as to where they really stand on the issue; the other in which they support the Hebron agreement unreservedly. It is this second scenario which Labour has opted for. A middle course would have been for Labour to support the government conditionally, such as by requiring a cabinet reshuffle in which incumbent ministers opposed to the agreement are removed and supporters from the opposition are included. This last scenario would have proved that Labour, though in the opposition, can substantially affect the course of events.

Various forms of restructuring the parliamentary majority in Israel are conceivable, for instance, bringing together a coalition of the secular parties against the religious parties (Labour and Likud are both secular). Two recent indications that this trend is in the air have been, first, a statement by Shimon Peres' most likely successor as Labour Party leader, General Ehud Barak, to the effect that he did not oppose re-negotiating the Oslo agreements signed between the Israelis and Palestinians under Rabin, thus facilitating a rapprochement between Labour and Likud, and, second, the discreet negotiations currently underway between Yossi Beilin, the main architect of the Oslo Accords and Peres' right-hand man in the peace negotiations, and Michael Eitan, head of the Likud bloc in the Knesset and one of Netanyahu's close associates, in an attempt to hammer out a common position on the final Arab-Israeli peace settlement.

When Israel's former Labour government signed peace agreements with the Palestinians, Netanyahu accused it of betraying the Israeli cause. With his signing of an agreement providing for the pullout of Israeli troops from most of Hebron, a segment of his own constituency is levelling the same accusation at him. The accusation reveals a contradiction in Netanyahu's stand: voted in to oppose the Labour line, he has ended up implementing it, albeit after tougher negotiations and at harsher conditions. While the Hebron agreement may have widened the scope of support for Netanyahu in the Knesset, it has also made the survival of his government contingent on the support of its opponents.

An important question is how the Arab parties will react to these changes in Israel. Here also two antipodal scenarios can be envisaged: one in which the focus will be on confronting the uncompromising Israeli stance with an equally uncompromising Arab stance, i.e., tightening the boycott, unifying Arab ranks and displaying a new solidarity, with Egypt and Jordan strongly supporting the Palestinian Authority and threatening even to reassess previous agreements if Israel abandons the search for a comprehensive peace that would extend to all Arab parties, including Syria. Indeed, there are those who claim that it is thanks to this approach that Netanyahu finally yielded to pressure and signed the Hebron agreement.

In the other scenario, the focus would be, rather, on playing on the contradictions inside Israel. The advocates of such a line could argue that with Netanyahu's hawkishness deepening these contradictions still further, the Arab parties should take advantage of the proliferation of discordant centres of power in Israel.

Other factors have contributed to weakening Netanyahu's position as well, such as the negative effect his intransigence has had on the economic boom Israel enjoyed when it seemed the peace process was moving forward under the previous Labour government. His lack of flexibility has also irritated many of Israel's friends in the West. True, Arafat has accused US special envoy Dennis Ross of bias towards Israel, but it cannot be denied that Washington is worried that Netanyahu's 'peace process' can frustrate Arab parties to the point of exposing the oil-rich Gulf region, so vital to US interests, to widespread instability.

With the American envoy's repeated failure to overcome the continuous bickering in the Palestinian-Israeli talks, the European Union has stepped in through its own newly appointed special envoy, the Spanish diplomat, Miguel Moratinos, in the hope that Europe too could help resolve contentious issues. The whole map of the Middle East is changing. And as the peace process reaches another critical turning point, it is difficult to predict which of its key players — Netanyahu, the Labour leadership, Arafat or, for that matter, any other Arab leader — will display greater dexterity in turning a particularly tricky situation to his advantage.

Memories of Ramadan

By Naguib Mahfouz

Ramadan has always been the month of worship and meditation, but it also has a lighter side. Immediately after *iftar*, the *sahra* would begin: lasting all night, it was very different from ordinary late nights the year round. These evenings were very special; we stayed up all night every night in Ramadan.

Ever since I was a child, Ramadan nights have been much more exciting and wonderful than all other feast nights. I even preferred them to the nights of Bairam. My first taste of freedom was during Ramadan, when I was allowed to sit up and spend the nights with my friends in the neighbourhood after being kept at home all year round. During the rest of the year, even if we played in the street under our house, we were supervised from the windows.

During Ramadan, on the other hand, we were completely free and we would go out with our lanterns and stroll around Beit El-Qadi Square and Al-Hussein, staying up all night.

As we grew older we took to spending our Ramadan nights at El-Fishawi's coffee shop. My friends and I would go there immediately after breaking our fast, and have our pre-dawn meal there. We would then walk home, all the way to Abbassiya, taking the desert road which at that time was not built up. This prepared me for fasting and meditation, as only cemeteries and vacant lots lined the road.

When I was young, we had no television, no riddles or serialised shows, and our great pleasure at El-Fishawi was telling each other jokes and witticisms, all in a spirit of good-will and friendliness and fun.

My memories of Ramadan are amongst my finest and fondest, specially as they concern friendship and good company.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

Just a step

Al-Ahram: "Life has been restored to the peace process. Yet the [Hebron] accord is only one positive step along the long path to achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the region — a step that will be put to the test in its implementation. The Israelis have never ceased to ignore deadlines and pledges on the pretext that they are not sacred!! What is truly sacred is to honour pledges and agreements to the letter."
(Ibrahim Nafie, 18 January)

Rose El-Youssef: "The agreement, protocol or 'paper' has been signed between Netanyahu and Arafat. But what is the meaning of an agreement to implement an agreement? What is the meaning of a pledge to withdraw while delaying an earlier pledge to withdraw? Is it a new method of prevarication? I have no confidence in what is happening, it seems to be a temporary truce before the Likud returns to the offensive. We should be guarded in congratulating ourselves so that we are not stung twice by Netanyahu's agreements."
(Fathi Ghanem, 20 January)

Al-Akhbar: "Any peace-loving person would hope that the peace process will go on to achieve success, not only with the Palestinians, but also with the Syrians and Lebanese. But we should not be swept away by optimism. We should remember that the Hebron accord harbours a time bomb which can explode any minute-taking both sides back to square one. The Hebron accord is just a beginning which we hope will continue. But the presence of Jewish settlers living under the protection of Israeli troops is illogical and can explode peace efforts."
(Said Sonbol, 19 January)

Al-Mussawar: "What does Binyamin Netanyahu mean exactly when he speaks of ending peace accords? Is he referring to Egypt or to Jordan or both? Why does he have the false impression that peace is an Arab requirement more than an Israeli one? And why this talk of war when its destructive consequences will affect both sides and perhaps the Israelis more? I think that Netanyahu is unaware of the dangers of the present situation or any of its expected consequences."
(Makram Mohamed Ahmed, 17 January)

Al-Wafd: "We do not know how the Palestinian negotiator allowed areas of Hebron to remain under Israeli control or how he allowed 200,000 Palestinians to remain under Israeli rule on account of 400 Jewish settlers. Although the exact text of the Hebron accord has not been made public, it is clear that Israel has stood to gain from it. Through its settlements Israel has planted a thorn in the side of any future Palestinian state. Yet the Hebron accord proves that Israel will only permit the Palestinians to run their own services while the land remains Israeli."
(Editorial, 19 January)

Al-Arabi: "Nothing is new about the Hebron accord. It is one link in a long chain of concessions to which Arafat and the Arabs have grown used to presenting, time and again — a fateful addiction which seems to have no remedy: a riddle with no solution. The Arab parties seem very forceful in front of microphones when they threaten to freeze normalisation or besiege Israel. But then they go into the closed negotiating rooms and come out smiling. The Arabs give in and the Israelis always win. What is it exactly that goes on inside? Nobody really knows except God and the American mediator."
(Emad Eddin Hussein, 20 January)

Al-Gomhuria: "Celebrating the [Hebron] accord inspires optimism and hope in those who support peace but poses a question as to what comes next. It is a considerable achievement after many long months of Israeli intransigence on the instructions of Netanyahu. But there are still many issues which must be decided on before the final phase negotiations begin. These explosive issues are security, economic and technical ones which will map out the course of the PNA in the next phase."
(Editorial, 17 January)

Al-Ahram: "The most dangerous thing about what has been achieved in Hebron is that agreements arrived at previously have been negotiated again. This opens the door for Israel to continue along this line with any number of pretexts. The real solution to the peace process is the answer to the following question: What after Hebron? All the main issues like settlements, refugees, Jerusalem, water, borders and prisoners have been put off for later phase negotiations. None of the main problems have been solved. Until the Golan negotiations restart, Israel honours what it has signed and until the principle of land for peace is upheld, the Hebron accord will remain a Ramadan riddle awaiting a solution."
(Ihsan Bakr, 19 January)

*Compiled by **Hala Saqr***



The minister of culture, Farouk Hosni, smiles encouragingly, and usually optimistically. And with the opening last week of this year's Cairo International Book Fair he certainly has a lot to look forward to. His nose, though a mite retroussé is far from haughty. The protruding chin, and behind the lenses of his glasses protruding eyes that almost meet the eyebrows, are crowned by a bohemian hairstyle that makes him appear a hybrid between the artists of Montmarte, El-Ghouriya and Musafir Khana.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Anarchy and anguish

Sudan is steadily slipping into anarchy. Every day there are fresh reports on the escalation of military action against the regime in Khartoum; every day new military and strategic positions fall to the opposition forces. Needless to say, the situation in Sudan has reached a critical stage. Not only are the independence and security of the Sudanese people threatened, but the national and strategic interests of Egypt, which has a stake in maintaining the unity and sovereignty of Sudan, are also at risk.

The regime in Sudan has failed to reconcile conflicting interests, be they local, regional, or international. It pays scant attention to the very special problems of a country like Sudan. The past few years have witnessed widespread confusion and a steady deterioration in Sudan's relations with neighbouring countries. Al-Bashir's attempts to impose his reactionary religious orientation on others have isolated his regime from a modern world based on political pluralism and civil liberties.

Sudan's position has deteriorated further due to the fact that most of its political leaders and intellectual figures are now living in exile; the enmity of neighbouring countries, and an unprecedented economic crash, have done little to improve the situation.

There may be some truth in the idea that attempts by some regional powers to overthrow the Khartoum regime are backed by international forces which seek to divide Sudan. Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda are not participating directly in the fighting, but there is evidence that they are supporting the opposition by supplying it with weapons worth $20 million, recently provided by the US. It must also be said, however, that the regime itself is its own worst enemy: it has given its opponents sufficient justification to engineer its downfall. The regime has contributed to the worsening of relations with Egypt by providing shelter to the terrorists accused of plotting the assassination of President Mubarak. Egypt, therefore, could hardly be expected to respond favourably to Al-Bashir's request for support against the opposition forces closing in on him from the south.

Though the Sudanese opposition has managed to close ranks and unite the *Ittihadi and Umma* Party forces with those of John Garang in the struggle to overthrow the regime in Khartoum, there are grave dangers to Sudan which cannot be ignored. It seems highly unlikely that the opposition will manage to bring down the regime without putting the unity of the country in danger. The military option chosen by the opposition forces cannot prevent Sudan from falling into an abyss of disintegration, anarchy and more bloodshed.

The dilemma facing Egypt is that the survival of Al-Bashir's regime, in all its hostility and ignorance, will not strengthen the bond between the two countries; nor will it serve the Sudanese people. The regime's collapse, on the other hand, implies inevitable disintegration. Nor is there anything to indicate that the opposition's victory would be the best way of preserving Sudanese unity.

Should the Security Council move ahead on its resolutions — which have been delayed thus far — to prohibit air navigation to and from Sudan, Al-Bashir's regime could collapse very rapidly. The advance of the opposition forces is insufficient: the crucial factor will be popular action against the regime. In the next few days we may see critical developments. In any case, Egypt cannot remain a mere observer should Sudan's unity be in danger.



Soapbox

Women's room

Women's publications first coincided with the rise of the Arab feminist and nationalist movements. With more educated women in different Arab countries and enhanced awareness of women's rights, women's intellectual output expanded, yet their publications received no recognition.

In the past two decades, a number of women have tried to redress this disparity. In 1993, five women established Nour, the first publishing house for Arab women.

A number of obstacles arose, however. Funding was the first. Arab donors did not respond favourably to proposals we submitted. This was due to lack of confidence in the ability of women to successfully run a publishing house, or a belief that requests for funding were premature. On the other hand, European donor institutions agreed to lend unconditional support to the first six books published in Nour's first two years.

Finding competent translators for writings in the social sciences was no mean feat.

Another obstacle was distribution. Arab distributors are mainly concerned with profit. Many distributors believe that there is no market for women's books. From our limited experience it transpired that fiction is easier to distribute than social science literature.

Nevertheless, it is unfair to judge distribution in the absence of effective marketing and publicity skills. Undoubtedly, if more bookshops specialised in distributing women's writings, and more relevant activities were organised, the distribution of such material would improve.

The challenge in the Arab world is to ensure the continuity of output and guarantee financial resources; in other words, the challenge is to survive. In the final analysis, we aim for greater contributions by and for women, not only in publishing but in society as a whole.



Hasnaa Mekdashi

This week's Soapbox speaker is the executive director of Nour: Arab Women's Publishing House.

The real meaning of the Hebron deal

Media hype and patched-together White House lawn ceremonials cannot hide the continuing dispossession of the Palestinian people. In whatever small way, we must prepare for the next phase, writes **Edward Said**

The Hebron agreement signed with such fanfare and excitement a few days ago was of course really signed in September 1995, as part of the Oslo II Accord celebrated with all the usual flourishes and patched-together ceremonials on the White House lawn. When I visited Hebron last July I paid a call on an old friend, Mayor Mustafa Natshe, to find out from him what he saw as the future of his town. Among other things he told me that he had pleaded with Yasser Arafat and his men during the summer 1995 Taba negotiations that led up to Oslo Two, not to sign an agreement that would give a Palestinian seal of approval to the 450 illegal settlers — most of them fanatics of the sort that had nurtured Baruch Goldstein and were soon to produce the lamentable Noam Friedman — squatting with such offensive, even murderous insistence in the centre of what in fact is an Arab town.

"It isn't just the principle of the thing that is so galling," he said, "but the fact that giving them this foothold in our midst by partitioning the town makes it possible for them to use Hebron as a precedent for staying in all their other settlements, extending their reach further all over the West Bank." Nashe's pleas went unheard, as Arafat and his team pressed ahead with their Israeli peace "partners" (the word has now entered official Palestinian discourse) who of course consolidated their gains with, I suspect, a sense of disbelief. How else could even the most hardened Israeli explain the fact that the Palestinians had accepted a formula for "co-existence" in Hebron which gave 450 people who sat there with the Israeli army guarding them, the choicest 20 per cent of the town's commercial centre, whereas the 160,000 resident Palestinians were expected to be happy that they got an 80 per cent that was so bogged down with conditions, reservations, and stipulations as to make it virtually a peripheral part of the Israeli enclave. What sort of "strategic" calculation on the part of the Palestinian leadership produced acquiescence in that bizarre mathematics whereby an Israeli settler population of about 3 per cent got 20 per cent of an Arab city, were allowed to carry their arms, were abetted by Israeli patrols who were given virtually the run of the hills surrounding the town, while the Palestinian police were limited to a few poorly armed men, theoretically subject to Israeli restraints in everything they did?

Nevertheless, there seemed to be genuine euphoria among Hebronites, for whom the presence of Israeli settlers and soldiers has been so unpleasant an ordeal; just seeing some of them leave in the hope of not having them come back on quite the same basis as before supplied a good day's worth of celebration. But there, alas, much of the jubilation will be as short-lived as it was when Ramallah and Nablus went through the same happy catharsis eighteen months ago. Despite super-magnified Palestinian cheers and exultant announcements, Hebron was not liberated. 80 per cent of it was given the right to administer municipal affairs (sanitation, health, postal delivery, education, local security and traffic) under the Palestine authority's jurisdiction, with Israel still in charge of security, entrances and exits, water, and over-all sovereignty. The ambiguities of the situation are evident in reports from Hebron carried recently in the press. On the first day, there were reports citing Netanyahu and Sharansky as to how Hebron is still Israeli, backed up by facts and figures showing continued Israeli control over the city. The next day, one could read editorials and news stories predicting a Palestinian state emerging soon from the messy Palestinian "archipelago" (the word is perfectly apt) that has left both the West Bank and Gaza divided into lots of little parts without territorial continuity or sovereignty. This schizophrenic scenario must also be afflicting Palestinians who want to believe that they are moving forward at the same time that all the evidence points in an opposite direction.

On US television the de rigeur scene of Arafat and Netanyahu shaking hands with American mediator Dennis Ross between them showed a grim-faced Arafat anxious to speed away into the night. What he had held out for was supposedly a series of US-Israeli guarantees that there would be a timetable of Israeli army withdrawals, or rather deployments from Area B (rural areas and Palestinian villages that constitute about 23 per cent of the West Bank, an area which is now jointly patrolled by Israeli and Palestinian detachments although Israel controls security there) and even, according to some wishful thinking, from Area C, or the 73 per cent of the West Bank (minus Jerusalem) totally controlled by Israel because C contains all the settlements, roads, military areas, etc. What he got instead was a series of "remarks", as they were instantly dubbed, that had absolutely no binding power on Israel. True he did get a timetable of dates for redeployment from Area B, but they were stretched out over an extra year and, worse, no specific areas were mentioned. As the *New York Times* coyly put it in its jubilant report of how well things went, the actual amounts of land to be ceded to the Palestinians were left entirely to "Israel's discretion." Now this is precisely how things were left in the Oslo Two documents, since just before the Washington signing the Israelis calmly removed the specific areas of re-deployment already agreed upon between them and the Palestinians and simply left the timetable. Apparently Arafat strenuously demurred at this, but under American pressure was made to sign anyway. His latest heroics during the Hebron negotiations were clearly meant to make up for what had happened earlier, but he failed again. No wonder he didn't particularly want to answer any questions.

It has been no secret that the US, which has subcontracted out its Middle Eastern policy to Dennis Ross and his little coterie of experts, placed Arafat under impossible pressure. Israel's political concerns, its exaggerated obsessions with security and terror, the notion that one armed settler deserved more consideration than thousands of Palestinians: all these were adopted by the US middle-men who were acting as anything but honest brokers. There was also an important confluence of strategic aims that united Netanyahu and Ross, namely that there should never be anything resembling real Palestinian self-determination. And indeed to this day, three and a half years after Oslo began, "autonomy" for Palestinians is all that has been achieved, and achieved in tiny enclaves throughout the West Bank whose roads, access and exits are controlled by Israel. In addition, an important town like Ramallah is now surrounded by settlements on three sides. Sovereignty in the true sense of the word remains in Israel's hands, and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

One might well ask then why so many Israelis seem upset by this agreement which after all keeps them firmly in charge throughout the still-Occupied Territories? The reason is an ideological fanaticism so deep and all-encompassing that most Western and even Arab readers do not have an adequate sense of what its imperatives are. Despite the presence in Palestine of millions of Palestinians they have always been considered aliens, to be tolerated at most, to be driven out or treated either as non-existent or as juridical inferiors in most cases. In addition, the land of Palestine is considered to be the land of Jewish people entrusted to Israel; no non-Jews are doctrinally allowed to use or have this land. This is why Netanyahu, more honest than Peres, has always refused to accept the formula "land for peace," and why at no point in the negotiations, now or in the future, is sovereignty accorded to non-Jews as an admissible concept. I believe these positions are also shared by the "acceptable" Israelis (including the ubiquitous Amos Oz) whose views are routinely aired in the Western media as representative of the peace camp, and do a brilliant job of concealing their real views of Palestinians (not so different from Likud's) beneath a carpet of conscience-rending, anguished prose. They never bring up sovereignty for Palestinians either. Yes, many of them (including the egregious Henry Kissinger) speak of having a Palestinian state, which they say they would accept, but never has any of them, specified sovereignty, and real self-determination for Palestinians. Yes, they say, you *can have your little insignificant state, but it must be* demilitarised, we will keep our settlements, we will be in charge of security, we will control exits and entrances, the economy and a few other things like water; otherwise you can call it anything you like, even a state. We retain sovereignty in all cases.

Trying to put myself in the shoes of the PLO men who continue to produce such, to put it mildly, disadvantageous agreements that do nothing to change the course of Israeli policy, I keep asking what our leaders must be thinking (they certainly do not do very much talking about what they are up to, and share very little with their people beyond the usual triumphalist nonsense). All I can come up with is a series of unflattering rationales for going on as before, with equally bad results and equally tragic consequences for the whole people. One rationale is that so long as the peace process guarantees the centrality of the PLO and its leader, then more or less anything goes. A second is that being so outmanouevered, out-gunned, out-smarted by Israel you feel you have no choice but to go on, trying to brazen it out vis-à-vis your own people with a lot of hopeful but ultimately misleading speeches and promises; meanwhile you surround yourself with supporters who tell you what you want to hear, and are anxious to help you set up more feel-good things like a bagpipe band, a few luxurious cars and houses, postage stamps with your face on them, and so on. The best thing of all is go on as many state visits (none of them necessary) as possible: one day Stockholm, another Paris, another Beijing, another Cairo. Third is the tactic of making more concessions, accepting all the humiliating Israeli conditions in the wishful fantasy that some day you'll either stop having to make concessions or the Israelis will give you a few things back. Fourth is the rationale that this is politics, a dirty business, and so we proceed with the Israelis like partners in crime, never mind that they get all the advantages, a lot of commercial deals have come our way.

There may be one or two more possibilities but none of them explains the Palestinian streets' acceptance of this appalling situation, which seems to be getting worse daily. Many of Arafat's advisers are intelligent men and women, quite a few of them with long histories in progressive politics. Why are they so silent? And why do the most gifted so willingly accept a few material advantages (a car, an office, a position, a VIP designation) in return for continuing to work with a man whose tactics they loathe and whose mistakes over the past few years they know, and have said openly, have brought us as Palestinians and as Arabs to one of the lowest points in our history? Why silence, and why cooperation? Do they feel no obligation towards the truth and to the misery of a people whose continuing dispossession could have been alleviated a thousand times more than the PLO has?

In the meantime Netanyahu, Madeleine Albright and Dennis Ross will manage the peace process with the same results. Most people in the US and in Europe genuinely believe that peace has improved things for the "area," and that for the first time in 30 years the Palestinians are getting their freedom. This is the cruelty of the Palestinian dilemma. On the one hand we want to show that we desire peace, whereas on the other because of that "peace" the daily lives of all but a tiny handful of wealthy businessmen, security chiefs, PA employees, has become a good deal worse. For at least six months now the mainstream media in the US and Europe (this is equally true of print outlets, radio and television) has been filled with stories about the diplomatic front, the negotiations, the impasses, and the final breakthroughs, and completely void of anything that portrays what Palestinians' lives on the ground and in reality are. There has been no coverage whatever of *the thousand of students in Gaza who cannot go back to* their schools and universities on the West Bank (forbidden by Israel), nothing about the large number of Palestinian prisoners still festering (and in some cases being tortured to death) in Israeli prisons, nothing about the horrors that a large family in Gaza with an unemployed father and eight children must go though just to survive, nothing about the systematic, almost daily reprisals against Palestinians who try to prevent their own dispossession by Israeli settlers and army, nothing about what it means for a Palestinian to try to get in and out of Gaza, or the case of all West Bankers who have been forbidden entry into Jerusalem for a year, nothing about the checkpoints that make the little West Bank enclaves seem like stifling ghettos, nothing about life under Arafat's dreadful regime, with books, newspapers and magazines censored or banned, threats from the security services to average people, corruption on an operatic scale killing the possibility of regular daily business, *nothing above all about the total absence of* law or the rule of law in the Palestinian autonomy areas. The *New York Times* never reports on any of this with the kind of frequency that would make it the true background to the diplomatic stories it much prefers to repeat every day. How often do Western news consumers get a chance to see before their eyes the map that Israel has imposed on Palestinians, the crazy, unthinkable patchwork of areas A, B, C, and how Israel has been attempting to destroy even the possibility of a Palestinian national existence.

Given all this, plus of course the sense of frustration and hopelessness felt by every Palestinian at the cruel farce our leaders are forced to enact, it becomes an absolute duty to describe the actualities of quotidian life under the peace process unadorned and in the greatest detail possible. The world must be told by us what our people under occupation are still going through under the totally misleading reports — Israeli, American, and official Palestinian — of the peace process, whose most recent episode in Hebron is surely one of the most ironically cruel. This is not a matter of money, but of discipline and will. If everyone of us first took it upon him/herself to be informed about what people in Ramallah or Hebron or Bethlehem or Jerusalem are going through, and then attempted somehow to break through the official and media silence — a letter to the editor, a call to a radio or TV station, the setting up of groups to do this kind of work systematically and collectively — then we will be beginning our attempt at liberation, a minuscule and even laughably modest attempt it is true, but surely a great deal better than passivity and collective silence. The present situation cannot last. There are too many inequities and injustices right at the heart of Palestinian life, and the Israeli scene, with its mad settlers, and religious fanatics, simmeringly angry Army brass, inept government, and frustrated well-intentioned civilians who are tired of tension and frustration, is too volatile for another Hebron-style negotiation not to produce more violence, more suffering, more incoherence. Who is preparing for the next phase?

Reflections **By Hani Shukrallah**

The name of the game

Ever since the Oslo Accords were made public, we have known almost exactly what lies at the end of the process, yet we insist on being surprised, disappointed and outraged (or, alternatively, relieved, optimistic and jubilant), at the various junctions along Oslo's road to self-realisation.

Strangely, it is now the Palestinians who fiercely defend the text of the Oslo Accords, *while the Israelis* call for, and are actually enforcing, its re-negotiation. Notwithstanding this looking-glass situation, the violation of Oslo's terms by the Israelis was inscribed into the agreement from the start — not merely because of the deliberately vague and slipshod nature of the text, but, on a much more fundamental level, because such violations are inherent in the logic of the Oslo process. We know, and have known for several years, what lies at the end. We did not need the announcement of the Beilin/Eitan plan for Palestinian final status to awaken to the fact that only Bantustans lie at the end of "the Palestinian track". The participation of "Oslo's architect" in drawing up that plan was not a crucial factor; nor were recent Likudnik murmurs from Ehud Barak himself (Peres's most likely successor), necessary for us to realise that Labour's "peace project" differs very little from Likud's, and then only in form, in cosmetic details.

We continue to complain of Israeli procrastination in implementing its Oslo commitments, while a chronology of Oslo's signposts proves that broken commitments have been the rule rather than the exception. We are shocked each and every time Israel reinterprets, re-negotiates or reneges on these commitments; we conveniently forget that, from Madrid on, each and every commitment made by Israel was broken, reinterpreted and re-negotiated countless times. I know of no other peace process in history where agreements were made on the implementation of agreements, where yet more agreements had to be made to implement the implementation agreements.

What, for that matter, is new in the Israeli-security-alone formula unjustly attributed to Bibi? The very logic of the peace process, from day one, has been dictated by the preeminence of Israel's so-called security concerns, which the Arabs are called upon to satisfy in return for whatever fragment of land Israel decides to lend them. The land-for-peace formula itself, whose apparent demise Arab analysts never tire of bemoaning, inscribed the preeminence of Israeli security concerns into the fundamental workings of the peace process.

With war no longer an Arab option, the Arabs in fact had no peace to offer Israel: all they could offer were more and more guarantees, which are moreover subject to the law of diminishing returns. Arab and Palestinian security concerns were simply never part of the equation, despite Israel's nuclear monopoly, its decisive military superiority (ensured by the US) over all the Arab states combined, its occupation of Arab lands, the brutal repression and starvation wars it wages *against the Palestinians, and its ceaseless acts of aggression against Lebanon.*

A Palestinian or Lebanese attack on Israelis, even soldiers, justifies bombings, massacres and collective punishments of a whole population; Israeli soldiers who murdered a Palestinian youth were fined a fraction of a shekel in an Israeli court. This is the fundamental logic of the peace process.

As such, the mechanism of this process can only be that of rewards and punishments meted out by the American/Israeli alliance; more specifically, it can only be the legitimation of Israel's decisions to renege on past commitments, or even already implemented agreements. The closure of the West Bank and Gaza, the attack on south Lebanon, the Qana massacre, the "reconquista" of Palestinian cities during last year's uprising, and most recently the agreements on Hebron and troop redeployments from the West Bank are all instances of the way this mechanism works.

We know the logic of the peace process, we know its basic mechanisms, and we know what lies at the end. *What more do we need to see before it begins to* dawn on us that these are just the rules of the game? It is time to stop wasting our analytical efforts on Israel's most recent mood swing; it is time to contemplate alternative strategies.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Sami Keshk (Wood Carving)
Cairo Opera Gallery, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily 10am-2pm & 7.30pm-10.30pm. Until 25 Jan.

Constantin Xenakis
El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 355 1871. Daily 10am-9pm. Until 30 Jan.
Retrospective exhibition (1958-1996).

Jean-Pierre Ribiere (Photographs)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2pm & 8pm-11pm. Until 4 Feb.

Ramadaniat
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-2.30pm & 8pm-10pm. Until 8 Feb.
Works by Omar El-Nagdi, along with Mustafa Kamal, Ibrahim Abdel-Malek, Ivon Ezzat and Fares Ahmed Fares.

Zaccaria El-Zeini (Paintings, drawings & graphics)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily 11am-2.30pm & 7pm-11pm. Until 8 Feb.

Awad El-Shimi (Engravings)
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily 10am-2.30pm. 27 Jan-15 Feb.

Group Show
Exhibition Hall, Cairo Meridien Hotel, Garden City. Tel 354 8382. Daily 10am-12am. Until 15 Feb.
Paintings, sculptures and engravings by 30 Egyptian artists.

Esmat Dawestashi (Paintings & Sculptures)
Gallery Hotel Sofitel, Hurghada. Tel 065/442 261. Daily until 16 Feb.

Sixth Cairo International Biennale
Akhenaten Centre of Arts, 1 El-Maahad El-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm. Cairo Opera Gallery, second floor, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0592. Daily 10am-8pm. Until 15 March.
The Centre of Arts hosts the wings of the USA, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Palestine, South Africa, Morocco and Tunisia among others.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife, includes works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, housed in the villa once belonging to the Khalils and converted into a museum with little, if any, expense spared. There are also a number of excellent orientalist works.


Arabic Music Ensemble

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-3pm.
The world's largest collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures, including massive granite statues and the smallest household objects used by the Ancient Egyptians, along with, of course, the controversial mummies room. A perennial must.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm.
Founded in 1910, the museum houses a distinguished collection of Coptic art and artefacts, including textiles, manuscripts, icons and architectural features in a purpose built structure in the heart of the Coptic city.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.
A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including *mashrabiya*, lustreware ceramics, textiles, woodwork, coins and manuscripts drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mameluke periods and from other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculptures charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners. A state of the art museum housing the contemporary art of the state.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge, and whose Egypt Awakening became, somewhat belatedly, an icon of post revolutionary Egypt.

FILMS

French Films
French Cultural Centre, Heliopolis annex, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824.
26 Jan, 7pm: **Le Secret de Sélénites**. Directed by Jean Image (1983), the cartoon tells the story of a scientist in search of a talisman which renders its holders immortal.
28 Jan, 7pm: **Diva**. Directed by Jean-Jacques Beineix (1980), starring Frederic Andrei, Wilhelminia Fernandez, Richard Bohringer and Gerard Darmon.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

El-Jentel (The Gentleman)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, Poussi and Elham Shahin play it for laughs.

Nazwa (The Fling)
Rivoli II, 26th July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 8pm & 10pm.
The Egyptian version of *Fatal Attraction* with Ahmed Zaki, Youssra and Sherine Reda.

Courage Under Fire
Cairo Sheraton, Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 9pm & midnight.

Diabolique
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 9pm & midnight.
Sharon Stone and Isablle Adjani play a demonic trick on men.

The Jungle Book
El-Horreya I, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.

The Nutty Professor
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30pm & midnight. El-Horreya II, El-Horreya Mall, Roxy, Heliopolis. Daily 1.30am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight..
Eddie Murphy, thanks to a chemical experiment, confuses the scales.

Jingle All the Way
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm & 9pm.
MGM, Maadi Grand Mall, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Le Huitieme Jour
El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

The Rock
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm & 9pm.
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 5726. Fri-Sat midnight show.

A Goofy Movie
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.45am, 1pm & 8.30pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 5726. Daily 2pm & 9pm

MUSIC

Arabic Music Ensemble
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 23 Jan, 8pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra & Cairo Opera Choir
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 25 Jan, 8pm.
Compositions by Refaat Garana and Gamal Salama, conducted by Moustafa Nagui.

Arabian Evenings
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 24, 26 & 29 Jan, 8pm.

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya Sq. Tel 391 9956. 16 Jan, 8pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Gozour Troupe
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746. 23 Jan, 8.30pm.
Compositions by Fathi Salama entitled Rhythm and Percussions.

Sharqiat
El-Hanager, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. 26 Jan, 8.30pm.
Musical performance by Fathy Salama's troupe.

Daily programme at *Beit El-Harawi, behind El-Azhar Mosque, El-Hussein. Tel 340 7001:*
23 Jan, 8.30pm: Songs by Ahmed El-Haggar and poetry by Gamal Bekhit
25 Jan, 8.30pm: The Conservatoire Youth String Quintet
26 Jan, 8.30pm: Songs by Hani El-Hamzawi
27 Jan, 8.30pm: Poetry by Hassan Tolb
29 Jan, 8.30pm: Abdu Dagher and his traditional music troupe

THEATRE

El-Warsha Troupe
British Council, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 303 1514. 23, 25 & 26 Jan, 8.30pm and International Book Fair, exhibition grounds, Nasr City. 29 Jan, 8.30pm.
The troupe performs the Epic of Beni Hilal.

Arabian Nights
Beit El-Harawi, behind El-Azhar Mosque, El-Hussein. Tel 340 7001: 28 Jan, 8.30pm
Three tales from the Arabian Nights told by Sherine El-Ansari

Laili El-Warsha
Beit El-Harawi, behind El-Azhar Mosque, El-Hussein. Tel 340 7001: 28 Jan, 8.30pm 24 Jan, 8.30pm
El-Warsha Troupe perform

LECTURES

George Sale (1697-1736, translator of the Qur'an) and his collection of Arabic Manuscripts
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 23 Jan, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Arnoud Vrolijk, from Leiden University.

Wall Paintings in Memphite Tombs of the New Kingdom
British Council, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 303 1514. 27 Jan, 7pm.
Lecture by Geoffrey Martin, former Edwards Professor of Egyptology, University College, London.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Please telephone or send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo.
Tel 5786064.
Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by ***Injy El-Kashef***

Around the galleries

SEVEN young artists exhibit their work at **Khan Maghrabi**. **Amani Mahdi**'s meticulous watercolours take the historic areas of Cairo as their subject, while **Fahd Shawshara**, in depicting Damascus's traditional quarters, focuses on movement rather than detail. The drawings of dark interiors by **Amir Shawqi** are similar in tone and atmosphere to those of doorways and staircases by **Mohamed Ghanem**. The sharp contrast between dark and light in the work of both artists creates a sombre mood. The pastel and acrylic paintings of Nubian villages by **Amr Abdel-Dhaher**, on the other hand, are wonderful essays in colour. Sculptures by **Shams El-Din El-Qoronfily** draw inspiration from Ancient Egyptian forms. Three sets of three paintings by **Nasser Iraq**, each set with a different theme, each expressing a personal vision (faces, alleyways and the sea respectively), are also on show in this group exhibition.

Traditional jewellery by **Zaynab Sabra** is on show at the **Faculty of Art Education**.

Reviewed by ***Nagwa El-Ashri***


Zaynab Sabra

More books than ever, though the crowds, so far, are notable for their absence. *Al-Ahram Weekly* explores the pavilions and seminars of the 29th Cairo International Book Fair, listening to exhibitors, customers and, when possible, to ongoing debates



Thin on the ground

From both sides of the counter the view of the Book Fair is less rosy than in previous years. **Dina Ezzat** searches out the few customers who are attending to find out why they are so few

It is not at all business as usual at the Cairo International Book Fair. Many pavilions are empty, while book sellers spend their time yawning away the boredom as they glance at their watches to announce the end of their shift.

"This is unprecedented. The Book Fair this year is a real flop," said Mohamed Mahmoud, a cashier at the *Dar El-Ma'arif* pavilion. With no more than three customers waiting to pay, Mahmoud grumbled on.

"We said that this was bound to happen. We told them that it is Ramadan, that people are fasting and nobody would come".

But it is not just Ramadan that has dramatically decreased the number of Book Fair goers for this year. It is also mid-term exam time in schools and universities.

"The majority of those who come to the Book Fair are students and with the students busy with their exams it was only expected that we were not going to be very busy this year," explained Nabila Hussein from Italia pavilion.

After two days the low attendance figures were obviously causing alarm bells to ring in the organisers' offices. In response they decided to waive the usual entry fee to the exhibition grounds in an attempt to attract more customers, a ploy that has yet to attract the usual crowds.

On the fourth day of the event visitors remained thin on the ground and the only people reporting good business were those dealing in specialised areas such as computing and architecture, leaving the majority of exhibitioners despondent. The general consensus appears to be that the Book Fair this year has been mis-scheduled, and should have been delayed for at least a month.

"Then," said Mohamed Ezz of *Al-Nasheroun El-Massryoun*, "people would have finished their exams and covered the expenses of Ramadan and the feast and would have been able to come and buy."

The usual hard-sell agents for encyclopaedias and computerised dictionaries appear to be in for a sedentary month. There are simply too few customers for them to chase. And even the tape sellers are complaining that business is "completely dead this year". They have tried everything, from blasting the ears of potential customers with Amr Diab's latest, to the standards of Umm Kulthoum. But after four days they appear resigned to the fact that they will not be selling much this year.

The view from the other side of the counters, too, is largely despondent, with customers complaining about high prices. That is, of course, after they have found a title in which they are interested, not always an easy thing to do.

"I do not understand why they cannot put around some signs to tell us where to go for what. What, after all, could it cost them?" asked Ra'fat Saad, a doctor who was trying to find his way to the different pavilions that offer medical books. "I think if things were to be properly organised the Book Fair would do much better." In the view of Saad organisation is not just about directory signs. Even the pavilions, he believes, should be better organised and offer the visitor lists of titles available on different subjects.

Ibrahim El-Sayed, an Arabic teacher at a secondary school in the Governorate of El-Sharqiyah, also complained about the difficulty of finding titles.

"If I was living in Cairo maybe I could afford to come for two or three days and take my time to look around. But I travel to come to this fair so when I am here I want to be able to do everything on the same day."

The confusion of visitors, though, comes as no surprise, given that even participants in this year's event are unclear as to what is actually happening. Newspapers have carried announcements for several days now that the Book Fair would in fact be working normally, from 11am to 1am, despite being held during Ramadan. Unfortunately, though, no one appears to have told the administrators of individual pavilions, who have, by and large, split the day into pre- and post-*Iftar* shifts.

Code name Taha Hussein

Hala Halim witnesses the inadvertent triumph of Babel

Perhaps communication problems are to some extent inherent in cross-cultural encounters. But to the small and keen audience that turned up last Monday for the seminar on "Cultural cooperation between France and Egypt in the field of publishing and translation" the difficulty, at times even the impossibility, of hearing the speakers, let alone participate in a discussion with them, was caused by the choice of venue.

The session, as with the rest of the programme of "specialised seminars", was relegated by the General Egyptian Book Organisation to Saraya Talata (Hall Three). Unlike Saraya Al-Istithmar, which is entirely dedicated to the main seminars, Saraya Talata is an exhibition hall with hefty levels of noise pollution in the form of speakers blaring songs and advertisements. But the two speakers at the session, Catherine Farhi, director of the Department of Translation and Publishing at the French Centre for Culture and Scientific Co-operation, and Claude Boucheret, director of the Middle-Eastern Section of the Book Department in the Cultural Office of the French Foreign Ministry, battled valiantly to make themselves heard.

Boucheret began his talk by suggesting that "we are here this evening in a paradoxical situation which, nevertheless, is perfectly revelatory of our times", where we need to reassert the importance of the written word in its battle against television, video, radio and music. Turning to the publishing and translation programme he presides over, Boucheret reconfirmed the importance of "working together... to acquaint ourselves with each other through translation... in this Babel tower of languages". Boucheret then went on to give an abridged version of his planned talk, "very briefly, because of the difficulty of making myself heard".

There are two institutions in France, according to Boucheret, specialised in offering aid to publishers: the Ministry of Culture which is "more directly involved in the furtherance of French books abroad and has a translation programme and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which takes a specific interest in propagating "French literature — in the broader sense of the word — both in the original and in translation". Explaining the workings of the publishing programme of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Boucheret said the ministry did not so much offer a translation programme to various countries as look into those texts they feel are relevant to them.

First launched in Francophone countries like Tunisia and Lebanon, there are now programmes in 50 countries, each of which bears the name of a writer from the country "who had intellectual or spiritual links with France", said Boucheret. Thus, the Egyptian programme is entitled "Taha Hussein".

Illustrating his talk with examples drawn from the experience of the Egyptian programme which offers aid for both translation and publishing, Boucheret explained that the Department of Translation and Publishing at the French Centre for Culture and Scientific Cooperation, coordinates between Egyptian publishers who would offer a certain text for translation, translators and French publishers. Financial aid would also be provided by the department for certain expenses. The criterion adopted in the choice of French texts to be translated is their contemporaneity as well as their relevance within a coherent programme of translation of a given genre.

The programme, as both Farhi and Boucheret demonstrated, also comprised texts drawn from the humanities, medicine and cook books. Thus in Egypt, 150 books translated from French into Arabic have already been printed in collaboration with six local publishers. Asked how translators were chosen, Farhi said that "the word 'choose' is hardly appropriate. They are intellectuals who are not only conduits, but players in the cultural scene." She added that the programme plans to "include philosophy and psychology, which may sound a bit ambitious, but we decided that it is part of the role of a translation programme to present important but difficult texts."

While the audience appeared to have many more questions, the clamour of the exhibition hall mitigated against discussion, and so the session ended.

Something old, something new

Al-Ahram's pavilion at the Cairo International Book Fair sells CD-ROMs alongside antiquarian volumes. In between are some 30,000 titles

With more titles than ever at the 29th Cairo International Book Fair, Al-Ahram Publishing House is certainly pushing its wares. In Al-Ahram's pavilion visitors to the Book Fair can find reprints of the collected novels of Ihsan Abdel-Qoddous alongside the most up to date medical and engineering texts, together with everything and anything between. In total, some 30,000 titles are on offer.

"I think that Al-Ahram's pavilion offers as much variety as there could be," stated Hani Tolba, general manager of Al-Ahram Distribution Agency.

According to Tolba, the four months leading up to this year's Book Fair was a time of intense activity as strenuous attempts were made to ensure that the widest possible selection of titles would be available for the event. And the result is that Tolba feels confident enough to claim that not a single interesting or important title that came out in 1996 will be missing from the shelves of Al-Ahram pavilion in the Book Fair of this year".

Of the titles displayed in the pavilion only 5,000 are Arabic, the bulk of the remainder originating in Britain or the US, a reflection, Tolba says, of the small number of titles produced by Arab publishing houses when compared to their Western counterparts. This numerical discrepancy is further reflected, Tolba explained, in the fact that while over 99 per cent of foreign publications in stock are titles produced within the last year, Arabic titles are generally older.

This said, foreign books are very much the speciality of Al-Ahram Distribution Agency. According to Tolba, it is Al-Ahram's pavilion that provides the most recent foreign titles that other, smaller publishing houses and distribution agencies may not be able to provide.

"Al-Ahram's pavilion has always been known as the main provider of foreign books, particularly the scientific texts that students at the schools of medicine and engineering are desperate to get."

Such a preponderance of foreign titles should not, however, be allowed to overshadow several important volumes that have appeared in Arabic, including the prize winning *The State of Religion in Egypt*, a collection of studies compiled in late 1996 by Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

Many of the books on offer in the pavilion are, Tolba promised, being sold at a discount. "We have special deals with the leading foreign publishing house," he said, "particularly those specialising in scientific books. They offer them to us at a discount, which we pass on to the customer, in an attempt to reduce piracy." And for the most expensive volumes carried in the pavilion Al-Ahram offers buyers at the Book Fair the possibility to pay in instalments.

With an eye on modernising its service, this year Al-Ahram is, for the first time, offering CD-ROM books.

"There are only a few titles that we managed to put on the CD-ROMs but I think it is not a bad start and next year we will have a larger CD-ROM shelve," Tolba said.

Yet despite the fact that this year Al-Ahram is providing a comprehensive computer service intended to list all Arabic titles in print, high tech processing of titles is not its only innovation. For the first time Al-Ahram has also expanded into the antiquarian market. "We have a good number of collectors' items that we bought to re-sell," says Tolba. Such valuable volumes, though, are not on open display. They are, however, listed in the pavilion. Collectors simply place their orders and receive the books through a courier's service.

Interviewed by ***Dina Ezzat***

29th Cairo International Book Fair: seminar programme

Main seminars

Venue: Seminar Hall, Saraya Al-Istithmar, International Fairgrounds, Nasr City

Thurs 23
7.30-9.30pm Author and work seminar: *Al-Tayarat Al-Islamiya wa Qadiyat Al-Dimoqratiya* (Islamic Trends and the Question of Democracy). Author Haidar Ibrahim Ali discusses his work with Abdel-Ati Mohamed, Hala Mostafa, Mohamed Selim El-Awa and Rifaat El-Said. *9.30-11.30pm* Open forum with Minister of State Youssef Boutros Ghali. Theme: Privatisation and its Impact on Society. Panelists: Mohamed El-Gohari, Adel Hamouda and Mahmoud Mourad. *11.30pm-1am* Poetry reading.

Fri 24
7.30-9.30pm First part of debate on Arab culture and the future. Moderator: Gaber Asfour. Panelists: Mohamed El-Romeihi, Fahmi Gadaan, Bahaa Taher, Ragaa El-Naqash and Nouran El-Geziri. *9.30-11.30pm* Open forum with Minister of Health Ismail Salaam. *11.30pm-1am* Poetry reading.

Sat 25
7.30-9.30pm Second part of debate on Arab culture and the future. Moderator: Gaber Asfour. Panelists: Soliman El-Askari, Mohieddin El-Lazkani, Hana Mina, Atef El-Iraqi, Hoda Wassfi, Ibrahim El-Moallim and Abdel-Salam El-Massdi. *9.30-11.30pm* Open forum with Minister of Housing Mohamed Ibrahim Soliman
11.30pm-1am Poetry reading.

Sun 26
7.30-9.30pm Third part of debate on Arab culture and the future. *9.30-11.30pm* Open forum with Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui. *11.30pm-1am* Poetry reading.

Mon 27
7.30-9.30pm Author and work seminar. *9.30-11.30pm* Open forum with Minister of Finance Mohieddin El-Gharib. *11.30pm-1am* Poetry reading.

Tues 28
7.30-9.30pm Author and work seminar: *Fil-Masaala Al-Islamiya Al-Mu'assira* (On the Contemporary Islamic Question). Author Tarek El-Bishri discusses his work with Salah Muntassir, Rifaat El-Said and El-Sayed Abdel-Raouf. *9.30-11.30pm* Open forum with Minister of Supply and Trade Ahmed El-Guweili. *11.30pm-1am* Poetry reading.

Wed 29
7.30-9.30pm Author and work seminar. *9.30-11.30pm* Open forum with Egyptian Ambassador to Moscow Reda Shehata. *11.30pm-1am* Poetry reading

Cultural Café

Behind Saraya Talata (Hall no. 3).

Thurs 23
8-9.30pm Hussein Amin, Galal Amin, Abdel-Moneim Talima and Salah Fadl discuss the contribution of Ahmed Amin. *9.30-11pm* Younan Labib Rizk discusses his book *Masr Al-Madaniya* (Civil Egypt) with Mohamed Abu El-Asaad and Khalaf Abdel-Azim. *11pm-12.30am* Karim Abdel-Salam discusses his work *Bayn Ragfa Wa Ukhra* (Between a Tremor and Another) with Itidal Othman, Fathi Abdullah and Abdel-Moneim El-Baz. *12.30am* Song recital.

Fri 24
8-9.30pm Iqbal Baraka, Farida El-Naqash, Mona Ragab and May El-Telmissani discuss "Woman in the eyes of enlightenment figures". *9.30-11pm* Bahgat Farag discusses his work *Mi'za Li Kul-Muwatin* (A Goat for Every Citizen) with Ahmed Mursi, Mohamed Mustagab and Sayed El-Wakil. *11pm-12.30am* Open forum with a distinguished Arab guest of the fair. *12.30am* Song recital.

Sat 25
8-9.30pm Open forum with a distinguished Arab guest of the fair. *9.30-11pm* Ibrahim Daoud discusses his poetry collection *Al-Shitaa Al-Qadim* (The Coming Winter) with Shaker Abdel-Hamid, Sayed Khamis and Fathi Abdullah. *11pm-12.30am* Open forum with a distinguished Arab guest of the fair. *12.30-2am* A reading of colloquial Arabic poetry.

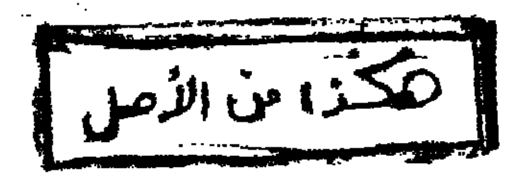
Sun 26
8-9.30pm Safaa Fathi discusses her work *Wa Layla* (And a Night) with Bashir El-Siba'i, Magdi Tewfik and Amgad Rayyan. *9.30-11pm* Open forum with a distinguished Arab guest of the fair. *11pm-12.30am* Abdel-Moneim Abdel-Qadir discusses his work *Hikayat Al-Umm Tuffaha* (Tales of Mother Tuffaha) with Salah Qunsowa, Medhat El-Gayar and Sayed El-Wakil. *12.30am* Song recital.

Mon 27
8-9.30pm Samir Gharib Ali discusses his work *Al-Saqqar* with Shaker Abdel-Hamid, Sayed Khami and Sanaa Anas El-Wogoud. *9.30-11pm* Nasser El-Halawani discusses his work *Matareh Hatt Al-Tayr* (Places Where Birds Alight) with Mohamed Barbari, Itidal Othman and Mustafa El-Dab'. *11pm-12.30am* Fawzi Fahmi discusses his work *Al-Thaqafa Wa Qadaya Al-Mugtamaa* (Culture and Social Issues) with Mohamed Hafez Diab, Abdel-Rahman Abu Ouf and Hussein Fahim. *12.30am* Song recital.

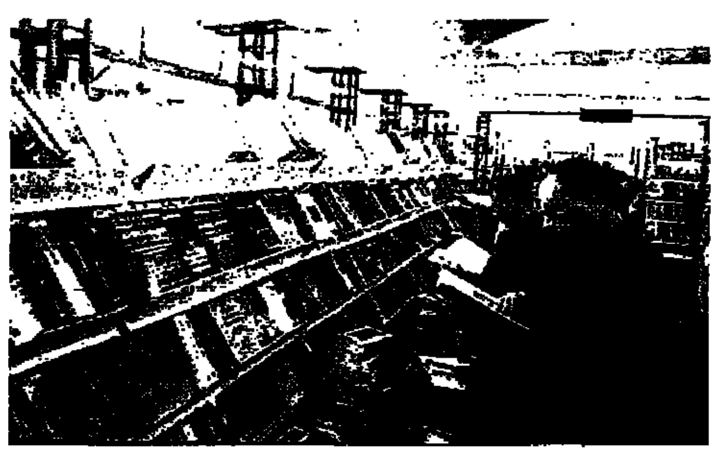
Tues 28
8-9.30pm Samir Gharib discusses his work *Hayawiyat Masr* (The Vital Force of Egypt) with Taher Makki, Ibrahim Fathi and Abdel-Rahman Abu Ouf. *9.30-11pm* Abdel-Hamid Ibrahim discusses his work *Shawahid Adabiya* (Literary Milestones) with Mohamed Gebril, Gamal El-Talawi and Sayed El-Wakil. *11pm-12.30am* Open forum with a distinguished Arab guest of the fair. *12.30am* Song recital.

Wed 29
8-9.30pm Ossama Khalil discusses his book *Al-Sharq Al-Akhar* (The Other Orient) with Talaat El-Shayeb, Said El-Kafrawi and Fathi Abdullah. *9.30-11pm* Open forum with Gaber Asfour. Panelists: Ibrahim Fathi, Mahmoud Amin El-Alem and Hassan Hanafi. *11pm-12.30am* Ahmed El-Shahawi discusses his work *Kitab Al-Mawt* (The Book of the Dead) with Ibrahim El-Dessouki Shita and May El-Telmissani. *12.30am* Song recital.

All information correct at time of going to press, though changes to programmes are likely to occur. Readers are advised to look up the day by day programme published in the daily Al-Ahram







photos: Khaled El-Fiqi



photo: Mustafa El-Senosi

Awards and rancour

Hala Halim attended *the open, sometimes* heated, debate on the *Report on the State of Religion in Egypt*

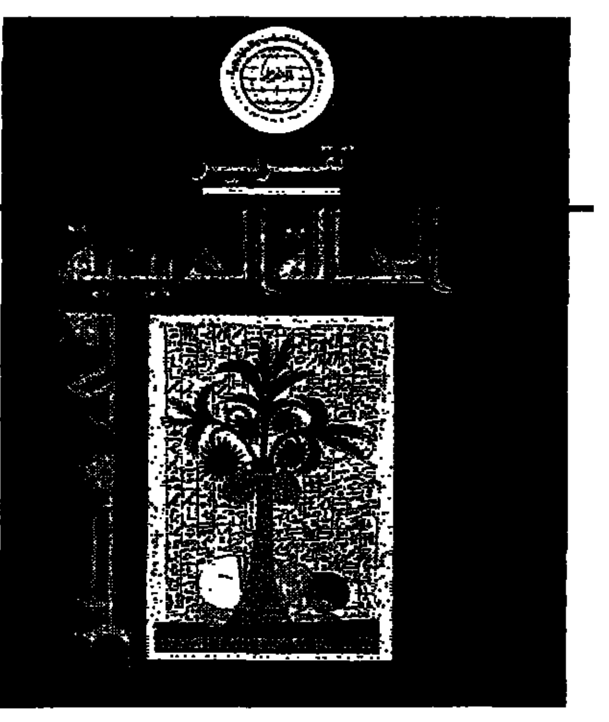
Taqrir Al-Hala Al-Diniya Fi Masr (Report on the State of Religion in Egypt), the prize-winning volume published by Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, was the subject of an open debate at this year's Cairo International Book Fair. The report is divided into four sections: official religious institutions (such as Al-Azhar and the Coptic Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical churches); unofficial religious movements (among them the Muslim Brotherhood); Muslim and Christian NGOs, as well as the sufi movement; and the dynamics of the political participation of various religious groups. Appended to the volume is a lexicon of terms used in religious studies. Since its publication last November, the report has occasioned a certain amount of controversy, which was fully in evidence at the session.

Mohamed El-Sayed Said, an expert at Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, moderated the session. Elaborating on the significance of the report, he spoke of the need for creating a body of knowledge about religious phenomena in Egypt. Positing that there was a gap in Egypt between two breeds of thinkers, the religious (represented by men of religion and Azharites) and the modern, El-Sayed Said said the report sought to redress this gap by creating a common language.

The first speaker, Nabil Abdel-Fattah, editor-in-chief of the report, responded to several criticisms that have been levelled against the volume. One criticism he cited was that the space given to Islam and Christianity was not proportionate with their numbers in Egypt. Abdel-Fattah's response was that while such proportional nit-picking would have been relevant to an annual census on religions in Egypt, it can hardly be applied to a report on religious phenomena.

Another charge brought against the report was that, within its treatment of Islam in Egypt, it overlooked an entire category, namely that of "independent Islamists", among them the preacher El-Sheikh El-Sha'rawi, who belong neither to the establishment nor to any specific religious group. To this, Abdel-Fattah said that constraints of space were such that some material had to be left out to ensure that the report did not become too cumbersome. As for "independent Islamists", Abdel-Fattah implied, the name was something of a misnomer, since many of the figures so described operated on the margins of the Muslim Brotherhood.

At *the outset of his talk, professor of philosophy* Hassan Hanafi said he would tackle a "number of problematics related to the report — and a problematic is not the same thing as a problem". Among the questions he raised was that of "the standard of analysis: the report gave us good, detailed information about the religious institutions in Egypt; but perhaps the more relevant approach to interpreting the state of religion in Egypt is... how religion... is used for social control", he explained, citing the changing interpretations of religion during Nasser and Sadat's presidencies respectively. Stating that "there is no such thing as raw information, but information as read and interpreted", Hanafi asked why the report had been compiled in the first place. In the same vein, he wondered what methodology was followed: "Is the methodology a historical one... or is it descriptive, or does it set out to analyse, or does the report attempt to enter into a debate with the Muslim Brotherhood?"



Hanafi also expressed reservations about how in each of the four sections of the report we were given the Muslim point of view and the Coptic point of view... which introduces a fallacious division and may cast shadows on national unity." Rounding up his comments, Hanafi stated that "although the Centre for Political and Strategic Studies is part of Al-Ahram Organisation which is part of the state, perhaps the report would have benefited from being independent from the state's views, particularly in what concerns its struggle against the opposition."

The second philosophy professor on the panel, Atef El-Iraqi, started off by asserting the importance of the report beyond the fact that it had won a Book Fair award, an honour which he teasingly described as not in itelf indicative of the report's actual quality. He then proceeded to outline what, in his view, constituted the shortcomings of the volume. The members of the team in charge of compiling the report tended, he observed, to quote their own previous publications, as well as those of other *Al-Ahram* writers, overlooking the benefits of a more comparative approach. He detected, he said, the odour of "petro-thought" among some of the writers who were quoted.

After a second reading of the report, El-Iraqi added, he became convinced that the approach was not restricted to the descriptive but that certain critical judgements were passed. What El-Iraqi took issue with was that this evaluative approach was not consistently upheld. Thus, he said, there was no reference to the pernicious role of a magazine like *'Aqidati* which was among the reasons for the assasination of the writer Farag Foda. Nor was there a clear reference to the funding by certain Arab countries of extremist Islamist groups. Likewise, the report, in his view, did not document the influence of Islamist groups at schools and universities. While the assasinations of writers and politicians were mentioned, El-Iraqi noted that the many legal charges of apostasy were not mentioned in the report — "I'd like to know what definition of extremism was adopted [in the report]". Among several other criticisms he expressed was the oversight of such religious groups in Egypt as the Jews.

A contributor to the report, Hala Mustafa of the Centre for Political and Strategic Studies addresed briefly some aspects of political Islam in Egypt. Tracing the origins of Islamist groups in Egypt, she outlined the current inner tensions and conflicts within them. Some of these conflicts, she claimed, went back to the fact that the groups did not accord as much attention to their ideology as to the organisational aspect of the movement. The last speaker, Deia Rashwan, also from the Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, thanked the two philosophy professors for their observations which, he said, would be taken into consideration for next year's edition of the report. He would restrict his talk, he said, to two aspects of report's compilation: how it is written and how it is to be read.

One of the main challenges of compiling the report was, Rashwan explained, the "sensitive" aspect of the topic, all the more challenging to write about "from within an institution everyone describes as 'official'". It was imperative, therefore, to have very clear-cut objectives for the report, said Rashwan. The main aims the team had set themselves, he continued, were to create a body of knowledge on the religious phenomena in Egypt, to introduce Egyptians of various persuasions to each other's practices, and to lay the grounds for a specialised research group to write on the subject in future. Answering El-Iraqi's criticism of the self-referential nature of the report, Rashwan asserted that those contributors from the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies came to only a quarter of the team, the majority of writers being outsiders to the Al-Ahram Organisation. The diversity of the group, Rashwan added, posed a challenge to the creation of a consensus for the report. As to the methodology adopted, Rashwan conceded that, given the divergent orientations of the contributors, the report bespoke a variety of approaches that it would take more than one edition to harmonise.

In response to the point made by Hanafi about the parallelism within each section between the Muslim and Christian points of view, Rashwan explained this in terms of the ground-laying nature of this first report which sought to define terms, discourses and points of view rather than assume a common knowledge about them. Rebutting Hanafi's charge that the report bespoke the official view, Rashwan commented that "those who supervised the report work for an institution everybody considers part of the state, but this does not mean that we automatically hold the state's view, in the same way that the university is part of the state but it does not follow that Professor Hassan Hanafi reiterates the official viewpoint. As to El-Iraqi's comment about the report's inconsistent critical approach, Rashwan explained that a report was no place for subjective visions and criticism which should be expressed in individual authors' articles.

A précis in ten

Ten volumes dedicated to the life and times of contemporary Egypt. But what do they include, asks **Dina Ezzat**. As much as possible, say the compilers

An encyclopaedia providing hard facts and figures on the political, economic, social and cultural dimensions of contemporary Egypt is an ambitious project, and one that had been much discussed even before the General Egyptian Book Organisation (GEBO) decided to embark on the task. But decide they did, and last year, with Mrs Suzanne Mubarak as sponsor and in cooperation with World Book Inc, Samir Sarhan, the chairman of GEBO, commissioned ten university professors to compile ten volumes.

Sarhan is particularly proud of the final product and for the duration of the Book Fair the ten hard-bound volumes that comprise the *Mawsou'it Misr El-Hadditha* (Encyclopaedia of Modern Egypt) will be heavily promoted in the GEBO pavilion.

According to Sarhan the encyclopaedia, the "first-of-a-kind" and "very well-researched", provides an objective history of Egypt from the 1952 Revolution up to 1996, a period that includes the Nasser and Sadat presidencies *and the first 15 years of* Mubarak's *regime.*

Sarhan's view of the project appears to be shared by those academics who, with the help of teams of researchers, were commissioned to oversee the production of individual volumes. From their point of view their mandate was to produce as comprehensive a database of information as possible on modern Egypt and, like Sarhan, believe the fruits of their labours should be available in every cultural centre, university and high school library in Egypt. Some even suggest that the encyclopaedia should be serialised in the newspapers.

So how did they go about condensing 44 eventful years — a period that saw modern Egypt emerge — into the kind of convenient précis that encyclopaedia headings presume.

Alieddin Hilal, dean of Cairo University's school of economics and political science and editor of the encyclopaedia's volume on government and the political regime, adopted a straightforward tactic. "I simply avoided being polemic," he said, "and stuck to the established facts, steering clear of anything controversial."

Hilal insists that his particular volume — The State and the Ruling Regime — is geared towards providing an overview of political developments since the revolution, with a particular focus on the regime's attitude towards the constitution, the four estates, and the space in which opposition political parties have been allowed to operate. But why, then, is the volume so heavily weighted towards the last couple of decades? According to its compiler, the reason is simple.



"The Mubarak years have seen unprecedented levels of political stability and freedom... and consequently it is important to lay the stress on this period."

Abdel-Rahman A'ql, economics editor of the daily *Al-Ahram* and the editor of volume number five, which focuses on Egyptian industry, takes a similar line to Hilal. The early years of Nasser's regime, and its drive towards industrialisation, are treated cursorily compared to later developments. The rationale, according to A'ql, is that "Mubarak was a man who received a bad inheritance but who nonetheless... managed to steer the nation through the storms and take national industry to new peaks".

By far the largest portion of A'ql's volume is, consequently, devoted to the economic reform measures pursued under Mubarak and their impact on industrial expansion.

Interestingly enough not every volume of the encyclopaedia deals with the modern period. Volume ten, for instance, is totally dedicated to Pharaonic Egypt, hardly surprising given that it concentrates on Egypt's archaeological history.

"In the volume I talk about Cheops, Tohotmos III, Tutankhamun and other celebrated Pharaonic figures," said Abdel-Halim Noureddin, compiler of the encyclopaedia's final section. Noureddin also makes reference to the major architectural landmarks of the pharaohs, without mentioning anything about the Coptic or Islamic periods.

"But nobody told me anything about linking my volume to modern Egypt," says Noureddin. "I would if they had asked me."

Volume nine, on Egyptian society, may well prove one of the most useful in the collection. In less than 200 pages, including 20 photos, Ahmed Mursi, professor of Arabic literature and folk art at Cairo University, offers a close analysis of the changing role of the individual and the evolution of social mores that govern the behaviour of both men and women. This volume, according to its author, "is not about anyone in particular. It tries to make no statements. It is only about Egypt".

The contributors to "Encyclopaedia of Modern Egypt" are unanimous in their belief that the project will serve to establish, once and for all, a large number of facts about Egypt.

"The idea of putting together an encyclopaedia on the modern history of this country is not a new one," says Sarhan. But recently, he said, it had become imperative to begin the project so as to properly record those changes that are redrawing the face of Egyptian society.

And in her preface to the ten volumes Mrs Mubarak pens words with which all the contributors would probably agree, as she expresses the hope that the project will reinforce the strong civilisational role Egypt has always played and that the ten volumes will serve as "a bridge that helps in the dialogue between different cultures".

Best books of the year

Fifteen titles received prizes from President Mubarak at the opening of the Cairo International Book Fair. Below are the judges' choices for best Egyptian books of 1996

***Asda' Al-Sira Al-Dhatiyya* (Echoes of an Autobiography), Naguib Mahfouz; first serialised in *Al-Ahram* in 1994. Award for best autobiography**

These parables, reflections and autobiographical snippets of Egyptian Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz first appeared shortly before the attempt on his life by Muslim extremists. The recent English translation by Denys Johnson-Davies includes an introduction by another Nobel laureate, Nadine Gordimer, in which she writes: "Whatever your personal hermeneutics, it is impossible to read this work without gaining, with immense pleasure and in all gratitude, illumination through a quality that has come to be regarded as a quaint anachronism... wisdom. Mahfouz has it."

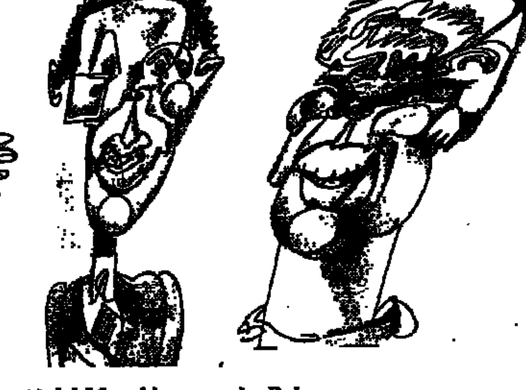
***Zinat Al-Hayat* (The Ornament of Life), Ahdaf Soueif; December 1996, Dar Al-Hilal, Cairo. Award for best collection of short stories**

Ahdaf Soueif first came to notice with the publication of *Aisha*, a collection of short stories written in English. She consolidated a growing reputation with the publication of the novel *In the Eye of the Sun*, again written in English. The current volume contains a selection of eight short stories, more than half of which come from her most recent collection, *Sandpiper*, published in London.

***La Ahad Yanam Fi Al-Askandriya* (Nobody sleeps in Alexandria), Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid; June 1996, Dar Al-Hilal, Cairo. Award for best novel**

It has been a good year for Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid. First his novel *Al-Balda Al-Ukhra* (The Other Country) received the Naguib Mahfouz Medal, a new prize instigated to promote Egyptian fiction, and now his most *recent novel has been* honoured at the book fair.





Rushdi Said, Mustafa Mahmoud and Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid as seen by Bahgory

The current volume, set in the Alexandria of the 1940's, combines fantasy with documentary techniques as it parallels the unfolding events of World War II with the adventures and misadventures of the devout Muslim Magd El-Din and his Coptic friend Dimyan, whose search for gainful employ leads them inadvertently to the Western Desert, and for Dimyan culminates in a martyrdom of sorts.

***Al-Haqiqa wa Al-Wahm fi Al-Waq' Al- Masri* (Illusion and Reality in Today's Egypt), Rushdi Said; Al-Hilal Book, November 1996, Dar Al-Hilal, Cairo. Award for best book in social studies**

The November issue of *Al-Hilal Book* provided an anthology of articles written by the former head of Egypt's Geological Survey, Rushdi Said. Now based in Washington, Said has lectured and published widely on many topics, ranging from the intricacies of hydro-politics to the clash of civilisations. The breadth of his interests is reflected in the three sections of the current volume, which includes essays on topics as diverse as conservation, education and demographic change in Egypt, the Arab-Israeli conflict *and the management of Gulf* oil reserves.

***Ziarah Lil Janah Wa Al-Nar* (A Visit to Paradise and Hell), Mustafa Mahmoud; November 1996, Dar Akhbar Al-Yowm, Cairo. Award for best work of science fiction**

Mustafa Mahmoud made his reputation with a book published, and confiscated, in 1954 entitled *Why I am an Atheist*. But times change, and Mahmoud is now an ardent Islamist. He still courts controversy, though, and the present volume's title piece was the basis of the script of a play which the head of the censorship board banned last October. It also comprises a number of shorter essays, including the author's thoughts on the Nasr Abu Zeid case and the Kurdish question.

The remaining prize winners are:

Award for poetry, *Waqt Li Iqtinass Al-Waqt* (A Time for Seizing Time) by Farouk Shousha. Award for literary criticism, *Al-Mustalahat Al-Adabiya Al-Haditha* (Modern Literary Terms) by Mohamed Enani. Award for theatre criticism, *Al-Masrah Al-Tale'i* (Vanguard Theatre) by Sameh Shoukri. Award for best specialised studies, *Taqrir Al-Hala Al-Diniya fi Masr* (Report on the State of Religion in Egypt) by Al-Ahram's Centre for Political and Strategic Studies. Award for journalistic writings, *Akher Amoud* (The Last Column) by Ibrahim Saada. Award for media studies, *Ahmad Bahaa El-Din, Sira Qawmiya* (Ahmad Bahaa El-Din, A Biography of a Nation) by Mustafa Abdel-Ghani. Award for science, *Fi Buhur Al-Ilm* (The Seas of Science) by Ahmad Moustagir. Award for general studies, *Al-Ummiya Al-Diniyya wa Al-Harb Didd Al-Islam* (Religious Illiteracy and the War Against Islam) by Ragab El-Banna. Award for dictionaries and encyclopedia, *Dar Al-Shorouk Encyclopedia*. Award for social history, *Al-Mara'a Fi Masr Al-Qadima* (Women in Anc.

Plain Talk

Watching the newly-produced film on Umm Kulthoum I could not but think about the role songs play in recording the history of the country. This fleeting thought at the time led me to review some of the popular songs and try to relate them to important events. Of course a song entails more than just the singer; both lyricist and composer contribute towards the finished product.

In a country with a high percentage of illiteracy, the oral word is more important than the written word. A song, or a picture for that matter, can produce an effect instantly which is why the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 took great care to develop broadcasting. In fact the first factory built by the new regime was for portable radios.

Going through the songs of the last 50 years one can see how Egyptian artists responded to what was going on around them, not only in Egypt but also in the Arab world and on some occasions, the wider international arena. I remember how in my primary school we learned a poem about the contribution of Japanese women to the development of Japan.

The dawn of the 20th century witnessed the rise of the middle class in Egypt, which, like middle classes elsewhere, had the privilege of education. This was reflected in the many songs in praise of learning and knowledge. Umm Kulthoum had a popular song addressing the youth of Egypt and urging them to learn and acquire knowledge so that they could serve their country. The song was delivered on the occasion of the national youth festival back in the '40s.

Umm Kulthoum sang nationalist songs written by leading poets such as Ahmed Shawqi, Egypt's poet laureate. One such song is still as popular as it was when it was first sung: *Ala Aab Misr Taduqq El-Akuffu* (At Egypt's Gates Hands Knock). That song came at a time when Egypt was the haven of Arab intellectuals who came to Egypt seeking refuge. Egypt met them with open arms and gave them political asylum.

There is no doubt that songs can play an important role in creating a sense of belonging among the young. Emotional reaction to beautifully composed words can achieve more than a tract on nationalism. A close examination of the worlds of song and music would reveal the instant reaction of Egyptian artists to events around them. Some of the songs come under the term folk art, meaning that they are without authors, or composers. They are in most cases a spontaneous reaction to a certain occurrence. I still remember a song which was popular in the '40s. At that time there was talk about building a dam at a place called Gabal El-Awleya in the Sudan or on the borders with Egypt. Fear and anxiety rose about the effect of such a dam on the state of the water in Egypt. Immediately a song was born and wherever one went the song echoed, expressing the people's worries about their supply of water.

Umm Kulthoum was not the only singer to incorporate history in her songs. Abdel-Wahab also sang settings of many of Ahmed Shawqi's poems, dealing with a number of political issues that went beyond Egyptian borders. One of his favourite songs, however, was about the arts and was delivered on the occasion of the festival of the arts. He sang for "the beautiful world of the art and for the artists who were its stars".

But it is perhaps only since the July 1952 Revolution that songs became nationalised, if one might use the term. As in any other revolution, songs were written in praise of the event. Many of the songs were spontaneous outpourings of feelings and emotions, while other were, more or less, directed. The revolution had its own writers, including Salah Jahin. His poems were sincere and touching outpourings of *an artist who found himself* completely in sympathy with the revolution. Most of Jahin's songs were set to music and many of them are still sung by people.

When the High Dam was built Jahine wrote his famous song *Ulna Hanebni Wadina Banina El-Sadd El-Ali* (We said we shall build the High Dam and we have built it). The song was sung by Abdel-Halim Hafez, one of a trio, including Abdel-Rahman El-Abnoudi, and Baligh Hamdi, who produced many patriotic songs. Abnoudi wrote the lyrics, Baligh set them to music and Hafez sang them. There is a full album of these songs, *dealing with all stages of our* history, the victories as well as the defeats, the sadness as well as the joy. The songs were so effective that it was rumoured at the time of the 1967 defeat that one of the trio's song was banned by the authorities. Such can be the effect of a song.

Mursi Saad El-Din

In search of a cure


photo: Ahmed Afifi

Mrs Mubarak, arriving at the Mubarak Library, is greeted by Ann Radwan, executive director of the Fulbright Commission

LAST Wednesday, Mrs Suzanne Mubarak launched the first of a series of conferences and workshops aimed at preserving our national architectural heritage.

The session, hosted by the Mubarak Public Library, marked the beginning of the campaign initiated by *Al-Ahram Weekly*, in cooperation with the Fulbright Commission, which endeavours to restore Egypt's architectural and engineering heritage. The first phase of the campaign will focus on saving the historical and architecturally distinctive buildings of downtown Cairo from neglect and ultimate destruction.

Emceeing the proceedings was Ambassador Abdel-Raouf El-Reedi, head of the Mubarak Library, who explained that Mrs Mubarak, rather than address the audience, would listen to the discussion. El-Ridi said that a great part of our national heritage had been lost through negligence and it was time to take steps to save what could be saved.

The conference was attended by Farouk Hosni, minister of culture, Mohamed Soliman, minister of housing and new developments, and Omar Abdel-Akher, governor of Cairo, Abdel-Rehim Shehata, governor of Giza, as well as a number of prominent architects, businessmen, historians and members of NGOs. In his address, Farouk Hosni praised the initiative, detailing some of the restoration work accomplished under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, but, he added, the private sector's contribution is essential to sustain an overall plan.

Hosny Guindy, editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram Weekly*, extended his thanks to Mrs Mubarak for taking an active interest in the campaign. He also thanked the director of the Mubarak Library for hosting the event and remarked that it was only fitting that such a debate should take place there since the library, previously a residential villa, was a typical example of architectural renovation, restoration and adaptation. Guindy also announced the intention of Al-Ahram Organisation to show the way, by taking on the restoration of a downtown building to be chosen by a committee of architects and experts in relevant fields, which will be formed in the near future.

Executive director of the Binational Fulbright Commission in Egypt, Ann Radwan presented detailed examples of successful restoration projects in Egypt — the headquarters of the Fulbright are now situated in one of the apartments of a delightful old building in Garden City and have been provided with state-of-the-art technology in turn-of-the-century decor — and in the US, where she cited the restoration of the White House and Biltmore House as cases in point.

Other speakers pointed out the difficulties of maintaining a minimum standard in tenanted buildings and of enforcing existing laws and regulations. Poet and writer Farouk Gweida enthusiastically welcomed the initiative, denouncing the crimes perpetrated against our heritage. "A thousand buildings have disappeared or have been damaged beyond recognition," he said. "I only hope that we can save what is left."

Alexandrian architect Mohamed Awad, head of the Alexandria Heritage Trust, warned against rashly amending existing laws regulating urban development which, he said, could result in further confusion and would fail to take into account the specific needs of every building.

Before adjourning, the guests were invited to view a series of slides picturing the buildings of downtown Cairo and the damage that they have suffered at this point in time.

Bringing back the trees

The removal of several buildings from public benefit lands may herald a return to a greener Cairo, Mona El-Nahhas walks around

The Engineers' Syndicate club in the Cairo district of Mohandessin was recently declared to be illegally constructed and a decree for its removal has been issued. The building, still under construction, was erected on part of a plant nursery and was intended to cover 6,000 square metres.

The removal process started on 9 January and will take about three more weeks, according to Adel Taha, head of the Central Giza District. On the day of the removal, Taha went to the site accompanied by security personnel from the Utilities Police to oversee the demolition. Taha handed over the land and the building to the Giza Cleaning Authority to be replanted, and workers from the district and the authority started their job. Tonnes of construction waste have been swept away, and the land levelled. Now construction workers are busy tearing down the concrete structure of the three-storey building.

The removal of the club took place just four days after Giza Governor Abdel-Rehim Shehata ordered its demolition on the grounds that it was built without a licence upon land intended to benefit the public. Shehata asserts that the law will be applied, and the governorate will not allow the establishment of any buildings on garden lands.

Residents of the district, who were against the construction of the club from the very beginning, are happy to have fought for their rights — and won. "It's a wonderful moment when you get the reward you deserve," says Soad Mustafa, one of the residents of the area.

Construction started in 1993, after former Prime Minister Atef Sidqi issued a decree allocating 6,000 of the nursery's 22,000 square metres to the Engineers' Syndicate. Inhabitants of the area opposed the decision, which would result in the destruction of hundreds of trees. On the day set for the beginning of the construction works, the inhabitants demonstrated in front of the plant nursery. They formed a human shield, standing in front of a crane in an attempt to prevent the removal of the green area (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, February 1993). Not content with this, they filed a lawsuit accusing the syndicate of illegally seeking to construct buildings on a green site and denying the inhabitants the right to live in a healthy environment.

In March 1993, the Supreme Administrative Court ordered all construction works stopped. The court based its order on the fact that the area on which the club was to be built is public benefit land where construction is not permitted. The court thus annulled Sidqi's decree. Soon after the court order was passed, construction works stopped completely, and the district took over the building, the concrete structure of which was completed.

The head of the Engineers' Syndicate, Hasaballa El-Kafrawi, is less than overjoyed at the most recent turn of events. El-Kafrawi told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he will file a compensation lawsuit against the Giza governor; he insists that the land of the nursery has been owned by the syndicate since the late '50s. "As for the building, it was established after we got a construction licence from the district in 1993," he says, adding that the syndicate will not stand by helplessly, but will defend its right to the land and the building in court.

Taha asserts that the building was constructed without a licence on state-owned land, and argues that its removal is necessary.

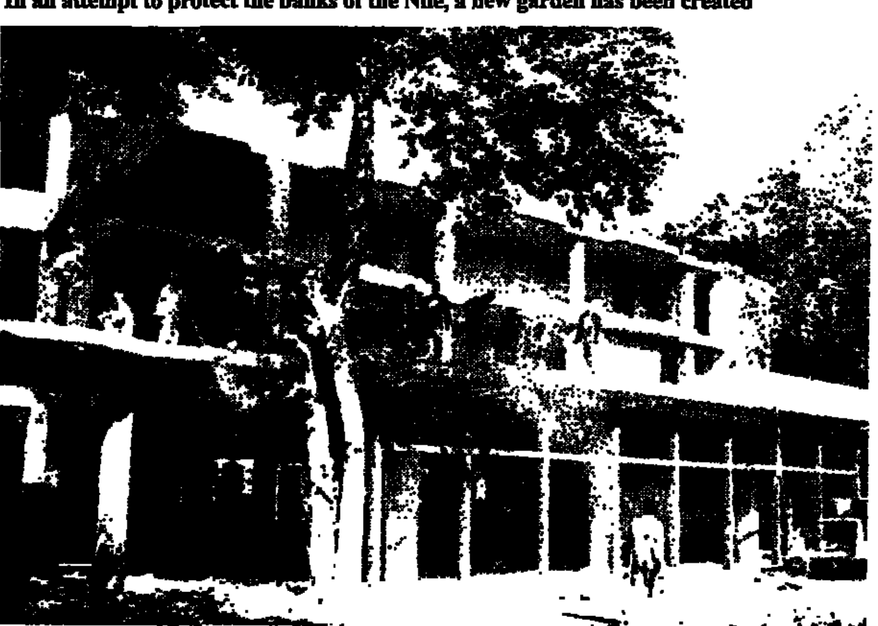
Mohamed Hassan, head of the Giza Authority, says that the 5,000 square metres of land surrounding the building are currently being planted, and the rest will be reclaimed by the nursery soon after the demolition works are over. The site will have been reclaimed in two months at most, and the plants will be shown at the spring flower exhibition, scheduled for next March. Replanting the site will cost about LE100,000, according to Hassan. The nursery houses over 3,000 different types of plants, including rare flowers and exotic plants, at an estimated value of four million pounds.

The removal of the engineers' club was part of the prime minister's military order passed last June, banning the construction of buildings upon agricultural lands. In this connection, Casino El-Nahr, which overlooks the River Nile in Zamalek, was removed two weeks ago. Work on replanting the land previously occupied by the building and converting it into a public park is now underway.

Another building in Zamalek occupied by the Gezira Traffic Department was recently removed, as it was built on a green area. And last December, Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri ordered the destruction of the Arab Contractors' Company, erected on state-owned land in Zamalek 20 years ago. The removal works of the building started immediately after El-Ganzouri's decree was passed.


photo: Randa Shaath

In an attempt to protect the banks of the Nile, a new garden has been created


photo: Sami Bushra

The building of the Engineers' Syndicate club being finally removed

Pot Pourri

Forbidden fruits

When we arrived in Sydney in the '60s, we had to wake up to a couple of sobering facts: first, mothers of young children did not work, as a rule; second, we, as a family, could not survive on my husband's salary alone. It had to do with the standards to which we had been accustomed, probably.

I promptly found a job which gave us a sense of financial security and placed me on equal terms with all the working mothers of the world, who waste much energy feeling guilty and trying to make it up to their offspring. Our only daughter, however, belying the general consensus on the consequences of such reckless indifference to children's basic needs (as reflected in women's magazines), did not exhibit alarming symptoms as a reaction to my "selfish decision".

She did well at school and enjoyed the playgroup, one of the few in Sydney which provided after-school babysitting services. Her report cards always described her as "outgoing" and "very popular". My colleagues at work assured me that these were the essential attributes of a well-adjusted personality. She was always away on weekends and her classmates seemed to book appointments with her weeks in advance. She carried a little notebook around, and would check to tell me when to schedule doctor and dentist appointments.

I often offered to organise barbecues, take her and her friends to the movies and the zoo, or on long weekends outside Sydney, but she always declined. Being so busy myself, I did not insist. After all, other mothers did not work full-time *and* look after their household. I had only the weekends to keep my house in order. If my daughter preferred to spend her weekends with her friends, it was fine with me.

She was growing into a healthy, fun-loving, lively little girl, so I did not worry too much and was content to leave well enough alone. I made sure, however, that she went to visit her friends loaded down with all sorts of delicacies. She came back with accounts of how they had loved the chocolate truffles, candy bars and carrot cakes. Soon she was placing orders and I was only too happy to oblige.

When our second baby was born, I decided to take advantage of the short maternity leave I had wormed out of my employers to visit the school and do what other parents usually did. A science fair was being held at the time. My daughter had a display that, according to her teachers, was likely to earn her the first prize. I expressed my intention of making an appearance at the school. "I'll bring the baby. You will be able to introduce your new sister to your friends," I told my daughter.

Suddenly she seemed alarmed. "No, mummy, please don't do that, they hate babies and they really don't want to see you. They already know about you. Just send some candy and stuff. They know how busy you are."

Her reluctance worried me. Leaving the baby with my husband, I went to the school on the last day of the science fair. There were lots of mothers there, and fathers too. I reflected that my husband had never been interested in our daughter's activities. He considered anything regarding the children their mother's exclusive province. Even having to stay with the new baby for a couple of hours had annoyed him immensely. Back home it had not seemed so strange, but now I was wondering about how my daughter really saw her father.

I walked around for a while, admiring the various displays, some of them sporting state-of-the-art technology which it seemed difficult to believe had been executed by an eight-year-old. Did parents help their children? I had only learned about the event accidentally, and my help had certainly not been solicited. I looked at the parents, many of them standing protectively over their children's display, some coaching their offspring on what he/she should say if asked questions.

Suddenly I saw my daughter's entry. In a simple, clear way she had replicated an Egyptian country scene, complete with a buffalo moving the water wheel around to water a small field. How could she have remembered? She was so small when we left.

Lost in thought, I did not notice a young woman approach. She introduced herself and proceeded to tell me how much she admired me for having a fifth baby without a husband. I stood there nonplused while the story unravelled. According to my daughter's account of her family, I had been abandoned by my husband and, in order to feed my numerous children, was selling candy at a stall downtown. In my daughter's imagination, that took care of both her father's indifference and the quantities of sweets I had been lavishing on her friends.

The job she had given me, on the other hand, could only appeal to her schoolmates. She took the new baby in her stride, unaware that in grownups' eyes the presence of a father was a rather essential social condition to such an event. I had to think fast. Should I betray my daughter and tell the teacher, who was still blabbing on about how "liberated" I was, that I was employed as a systems analyst, with a salary twice what she could ever hope to earn? Should I burst her bubble and break the news that the baby, our second child, was at this very moment in the care of a loving father, albeit one not quite *au fait* with modern fatherhood?

I looked around at all the upper-middle-class parents praising the brightness of their little darlings and their complicated projects. My daughter had worked alone and managed quite nicely. She had also conquered these self-congratulatory, law-abiding citizens. They had accepted her for what she was, regardless of her delinquent parents.

Making up my mind, I smiled sweetly at the teacher, who was busy explaining that she would never have the courage to have a child out of wedlock. "*It is only difficult with the first,*" I assured her. "It gets better as you go along."

We moved the following year. I made frequent appearances at my daughter's new school and forced my husband to take his turn driving the school team to the Saturday hockey games. Once a month, I organised parents' gatherings at our house. I was happy to notice that my daughter remained popular even without the added attraction of her "unusual circumstances".

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

"Abazi" lentils

Ingredients:
1 chicken
2 cups yellow lentils
3 onions (finely chopped)
1 1/4 kilo tomatoes
1 tbsp. tomato paste
2 carrots (finely chopped)
3 tbsp. crushed garlic
1 tbsp. parsley (finely chopped)
1 tsp. dried coriander
Salt + pepper + allspice + cumin
Ghee

Method:
Wash the lentils and soak in tap water for three hours, during which the chicken is to be washed, well seasoned and boiled in water, the bones removed and the boneless chicken pieces set aside. Drain the lentils, wash and place in a large cooking pan. Add one tablespoonful of garlic, half the onions, a quarter kilo of tomatoes and the carrots, then cover all with water to one inch above the contents and bring to a boil. Lower the heat and leave covered to cook. Blend in an electric blender and leave aside. In another pan, stir-fry the remaining onion and one tablespoonful of garlic in some ghee until yellowish, blend in the remaining tomatoes and paste, leave to reduce and season. Add the chicken, the parsley, and the lentils then stir, bringing to a boil. In a small saucepan, stir-fry in some ghee the third tablespoonful of garlic with the coriander until yellowish, add to the lentil-and-chicken mixture and stir. Cover and remove from heat then serve.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Change the name

Nigel Ryan on a lengthy metamorphosis

The Angus, which used to be a steakhouse but on its bill head refers to itself as a brasserie and, according to the sign now outside should be known, these days at least, as Chez Daniel, has been in Cairo for at least as long as I have. My visits have been infrequent throughout its long and varied metamorphoses, largely because, in its first manifestation as a steakhouse, I remember the staff as being frightfully rude. But times, as well as nomenclature, have changed, and no such charge could now be levelled at the staff, who are exceedingly polite and even a mite solicitous.

Daniel, one must suppose, is the man sitting by the bar who comes across to the table to see if you need any help. The bar itself is quite a long affair, which is really very useful since in its transformation into Chez Daniel the place has become more of a watering hole than a restaurant. The majority of customers seem to be happy to sit drinking and if they glance at the menu at all do so only to order a snack to punctuate the drinking.

Still, the atmosphere is really quite cosy — dimly lit, tables well spaced, a lot of red table linen and dark wood. It is a place that encourages its customers to linger and, in doing so, order another drink.

The menu appears to be little changed from its time as a steak house. The emphasis, certainly, is on meat, and the bulk of what is offered comprises a variety of cuts of beef which are served with one of four sauces — mushroom, pepper, mustard and roquefort. And since these four are served individually, in sauce boats, there is always the option of dispensing with them altogether. I, foolishly as it was to turn out, ordered asado, while my companions, more sensibly, ordered tournedos. The asado, a little surprisingly, appeared to be cut from the outer part of a piece of entrecote. It was tough, something not helped by my having ordered it medium rare. So I dutifully chewed before giving up.

It is only fair to point out that the asado may well have been an exception since both my companions found their tournedos, also ordered medium rare, perfectly fine. The sauces were as variable as the quality of the meat. The roquefort, served with the tournedos, was a remarkably floury concoction, flavoured with what tasted to me like locally produced blue cheese. Within ten minutes it had congealed within its boat. The mustard sauce, less floury, was a little too vinegary for my taste, while the pepper was the most successful, if only because it appeared not to have been based on a stodgy roux.

Each steak was accompanied by a salad — *taboula*, with a deal of coriander, alongside shredded lettuce — pleasant herb filled pâtés, french fries, and green, seasonal vegetables.

The bill, which included local beer — this was, incidentally, undrinkable, though that is the brewery's fault and not the restaurant's — came to LE120. And had the beer not been so foul we, too, would probably have lingered.

Chez Daniel, 34, Yehia Ibrahim Street, Zamalek. Tel: 34 11 321

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS

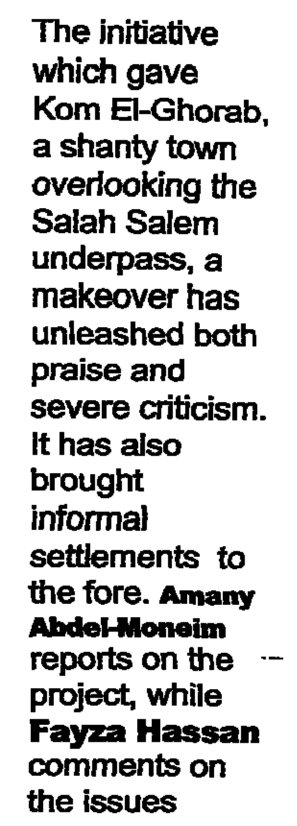
1. Arbiter, regard (5)
6. A lively Bohemian dance (5)
11. Parasitic fly (3)
13. Wedlock; harmony (5)
15. Self-evident truth (5)
16. Regret bitterly (3)
17. Bird of prey (6)
19. Languid (4)
20. Amphora; vase (3)
21. Nigerian tribe (3)
22. Ideogram; term; expression (4)
24. Presently (4)
26. French pronoun (4)
28. Rip (4)
30. Fantasize (5)
33. Shabbily dressed (5)
35. Draw to a close (4)
37. Make up case (4)
38. Elongated fish (3)
40. Pour forth; exude (4)
42. Short for dynamite (3)
43. Space in temple (7)
47. Sportsman (7)
49. Paddle (3)
50. Get all worked up (4)
52. Affirmative vote (3)
53. Puncture (4)
55. Additional (4)
57. Prod (5)
61. Comb. form for "four" (5)
63. Grain storing building (4)
65. Insect flying with low humming noise, pl. (4)
66. Pledge (4)
68. Hot-press (4)
70. Bunk (3)
71. Personal pronoun (3)
73. Credit; shylocking (4)
75. Spitefulness; bile (6)
77. Onassis' pet name (3)
78. Hostile; incongruous (5)
80. Free-for-all (5)
81. Red China's leader (3)
82. Covered with small bearings of indefinite number (5)
83. Meres, jumbled (5)

DOWN

1. Awards' committees (6)
2. Powerless (6)
3. Type of radio aerial (6)
4. Came into possession of (3)
5. Var. of "enough" (4)
6. Ma's mate (2)
7. Make rusty (7)
8. Plug; operculum of plant (3)
9. West African seed used as condiment and tonic (4)
10. Correct; change (5)
11. Brown-haired (8)
12. Personal pronoun (3)
13. Cardinal number (3)
18. Fester (3)
23. Musical note, pl. (3)
25. Metal (3)
27. British PM during the 50s (4)
29. Italian capital (4)
31. A relative (4)
32. Small contribution (4)
34. Period of time (4)
36. Commiseration (4)
39. Fertile soil (4)
41. Adv. of time (4)
43. Appointment (4)
44. Tongue-lash (4)
45. Semi-dramatic sacred musical combination (8)
46. Stiff-neck (4)
48. Praise (4)
51. Under instruction (7)
54. Ladies' garment (3)
56. Offend (3)
58. Amenable (6)
59. Provisioner (6)
60. Value (6)
62. A Titan (5)
64. ... de plume (3)
67. Burrow (4)
69. Nominate (4)
71. A heavy actor (3)
72. Historical period of time (3)
74. Goal (3)
76. French article (3)
79. Weather directions (2)



Last week's solution



The initiative which gave Kom El-Ghorab, a shanty town overlooking the Salah Salem underpass, a makeover has unleashed both praise and severe criticism. It has also brought informal settlements to the fore. **Amany Abdel-Moneim** reports on the project, while **Fayza Hassan** comments on the issues



photos: Mohamed Wassim

A graphic cry for help

Kom El-Ghorab is a shanty town in Old Cairo. About 10,000 people live in its 300 buildings. It is located along the road leading to New Fustat City, a stone's-throw away from up-market Maadi, yet it has no infrastructure at all.

Kom El-Ghorab is opposite El-Fakharin, the potters' district, where some artists rent small workshops. In the context of efforts to beautify Cairo, the municipality had plans to fence in the entire area, *thereby "improving the view" for tourists and commuters* passing through Old Cairo. But six months ago, a group of 15 artists, including Adel El-Siwi, Mohamed Abla, Hamdi Attia, Moataz Nasr, Sherif Saad, Sabah Naim, Sahar El-Amir, Ahmed Ramadan and Wafaa Shohdi, decided there was a better way to beautify Kom El-Ghorab.

The artists tried to make their work blend in with the natural surroundings of the place. They decorated the houses using materials available locally. They certainly changed the view, but their main aim was to avoid disturbing the harmony of the area, cut out of the calciferous rock in the vicinity of Old Cairo, and overlooking the ruins of the Old Fortress of Babylon. But not all the paintings blend in with the natural browns, greys and greens of the setting. Umm Kulthoum looms hugely in stark blacks and whites, while nearby, pots in brilliant blues adorn another facade.

Some, however, say the artists' endeavours should be complemented by serious efforts to upgrade the infrastructure. Zeinab Hammad, one of Kom El-Ghorab's inhabitants, is enthusiastic about the project. "When the artists started working, something finally happened," she says. "The government stopped building the wall around the area. This is the first time something is actually done. But I also think sewers should be installed."

Others agree that the facade is little more than a first step. "We should develop the houses from within, too, in order to suit the outside beauty," remarks Nadi Kamel, assistant director of the development sector at the Coptic Evangelical Organisation for Social Services. "Within a month a team from our organisation *will be in Kom El-Ghorab. We plan to* start a comprehensive development programme there," adds Kamel. The programme will aim at developing the infrastructure, diminishing the pollution caused by the combustion of plastics and other waste, planting trees, paving roads, and establishing new programmes for improving the status of women and children. The programme will also try to revive old handicrafts and raise the inhabitants' living standards.

"The Kom El-Ghorab experiment is not a brand new idea, it is a way of restoring ancient traditions," says artist Adel El-Siwi.

Pharaonic overtones? These paintings are a far cry from the ceremonies and victories at battle recorded on the temple walls. Nor are they reminiscent of the calligraphy and geometric designs on the walls of *Mameluke mosques. Yet they could be said to draw* some inspiration from both sources, if larger-than-life art needs ancestors. Frescoes on church walls, paintings on Nubian houses...

"Paintings on walls sometimes have political connotations, like those in Mexico or Berlin. Paintings can reflect the pent-up frustration and anger of oppressed people. Typical of this genre are the paintings of young African Americans in inner-city areas of the United States and the paintings in Beirut during the Lebanese civil war — but this is not the case here in Kom El-Ghorab. Here painting merely reflects a social trend," states El-Siwi.

"Kom El-Ghorab is very special," he adds. "It (the experiment) aims at decorating the houses but, more importantly, also serves as a meeting place for artists, who used to be isolated in their own studios. It makes possible interaction between these artists and ordinary people, who might not understand this kind of art," according to El-Siwi. "Artists are often concerned about their relationship with those who enjoy their work. There was a crisis in the plastic arts *which reflected the extent to which enjoyment of* this kind of art was restricted to elites and intellectuals."

Artists, it is true, never object to methods enabling them to gain a wider audience. Perhaps the Kom El-Ghorab experiment should be perceived as part of artists' more general efforts to break free from the palace or the museum and reach out to a less discerning — in El-Siwi's words — but vaster public.

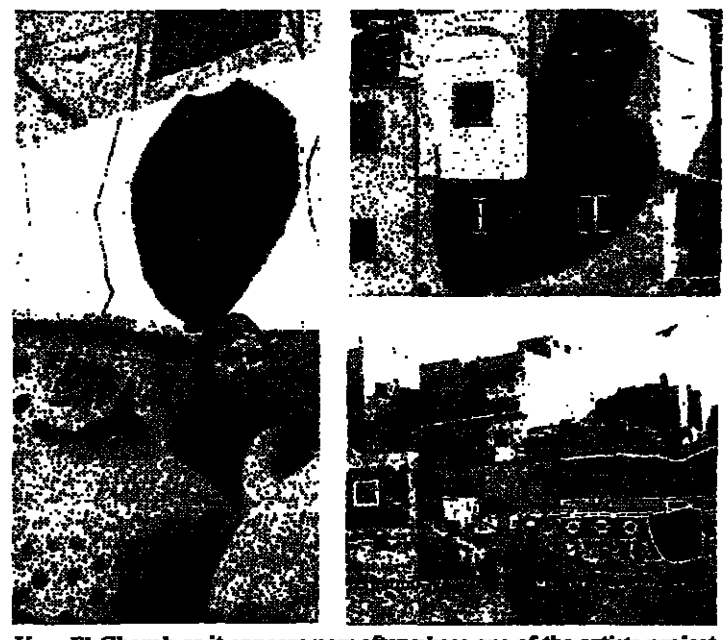
For Hamdi Attia, another member of the team, "popular districts are the most appropriate places for artists to produce primitive art."

"The *idea of decorating* a *shanty town came when* I was travelling from Milan to Rome," remembers El-Siwi. "After my return from Italy I met up with Mohamed Abla and Fatma Ismail." Three places were suggested: Dayer El-Nahia, El-Haitiya and Kom El-Ghorab. "Kom El-Ghorab was chosen because it is on a hill and has fixed dimensions — base and height. Its houses have the mountain as a backyard," Attia chips in. "It is also near the pottery district and this means that artists working in Kom El-Ghorab have easy access to skilled and cheap labour."

According to El-Siwi, the artists envisaged three phases for the Kom El-Ghorab project: the first from June to December 1996, the second from January to June 1997, and the third from July to December 1997.

Nor are painters and sculptors the only artists involved in this ambitious project. The National Council of Cinema has planned a film, to be directed by Magdi Ahmed Ali (of *Ya Donia Ya Gharami* fame) about Kom El-Ghorab. The National Centre for Arts will supply the artists with raw materials. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) organised a conference, *which was held at the Ahmed Shawqi Museum and* attended by foreign and Arab critics, to discuss the experience of Kom El-Ghorab.





Kom El-Ghorab as it appears now after phase one of the artists project has been completed. The facelift has raised the inhabitants' hopes: their area has a chance to be upgraded and their living conditions improved

Say it with paint

The decorative facades of Kom El-Ghorab have become a hot topic of controversy. Advocates think it will draw attention to a deprived area; detractors regard it as an irresponsible intrusion in the life of a community, mainly aimed at self-advertising, by artists who find exhibitions no longer pay as much as they used to. Driving along Salah Salem, commuters look up from the wheel in bemusement at the houses, more or less at ease in their bright new garb. Not quite a mural, not really graffiti, the paintings are intended to form a whole, but the artists' individual preferences and the inhabitants' suggestions have resulted in a good deal of diversity. What, exactly, are they? A new means of expression for artists stifled by the limitations of canvas? Or a statement of solidarity, an unusually defiant flourish of the brush? While the idiom has overtones of Diego Riviera, there is nothing to suggest that anything is intended but a fresh coat of paint.

Artist Gamil Shafiq remarks that informal settlements are part and parcel of the natural development of any large city. Immigrants from the country join already established "rural" communities, adding dwellings which they build with whatever materials are available on the spot. "They build according to their needs, expanding as their family grows. It is a natural process, better left undisturbed," says Shafiq, who thinks that if the community had felt the need to decorate its houses, "they would have done so without interference from the outside." He believes that the extension of the city's infrastructure and services to informal *settlements is about the only serious way of improving the situa*tion. Once equipped with a proper sewage system, running water, electricity and garbage collection services, these quarters will develop their own character and blend in naturally with the rest of the city. "They certainly do not need famous artists adorning their houses with pseudo-folkloric graffiti — the intelligentsia's perception of popular art," he concludes.

The inhabitants themselves look upon the experiment with astonishing equanimity. The decorated facades are not *really what it is all about. They are quite happy with the cosmetic job if* it is going to attract public attention to their plight, as they seem to have been promised. What is important is that they are not moved from their houses, decorated or otherwise. The breadwinners of these households all work in the area, as potters or brick-makers. They have all heard of communities which were moved to new cities on the outskirts of Cairo. Those who did receive apartments found that their new dwellings not only lacked the essential amenities, but were cut off from Cairo because of inadequate or inexistent transport. As a result, many found themselves out of work. Before the artistic experiment, the same fate had awaited the inhabitants of Kom El-Ghorab. The area was slated for demolition, a prospect which made developers' mouths water at the idea of the large profits such choice real estate would yield. Now there is serious talk of upgrading the area and helping the inhabitants with small projects. "We hope it is not only *kalam* (empty talk)," says Umm Alaa, raising her hands to the sky. "*If it happens, it will be thanks to him,*" she adds, pointing to Mohamed Abla who, with Adel El-Siwi, initiated the project, inviting a number of young artists to join in. Abla, who has a small pottery workshop in the area, is on friendly terms with the inhabitants, including the women, "who have the last word in matters concerning their households," he says. They trust him, he explains, and realise that he wants to help them. This is why they unanimously welcomed his initiative.

Inside Kom El-Ghorab, there is little to suggest the colourful facade. Most of the families live in one-room houses which lean, one upon the other, haphazard yet closely integrated. Alleyways lead through houses; the boundaries between public and private space *have not been integrated* into the architecture, and the impression is of a community turned in upon itself, facing within. Women throw the washing-up water out onto the main street, there are no sewers and no electricity. But here and there, the artists' influence is clear. Mohamed, a 12-year-old whose enthusiasm was fired by their work, decided that the walls of his family's one-room dwelling needed to be decorated as well. With cuttings from old magazines and some paint, he created a collage which he completed with drawings of his own. "My Mohamed wants to be an artist like him when he grows up," says his mother, smiling at Abla.

But clearly the experiment is not only about the dissemination and appreciation of art. The facelift of Kom El-Ghorab was carried out by the "new generation" of Egyptian artists — well established in their own right, with media-friendly exhibitions behind them, in Abla and El-Siwi's cases. Their work in the potters' area, however, is reminiscent in many ways of the popular art on *houses in rural areas when a member of the family returns from* the *Hajj*. But the Kom El-Ghorab experiment can hardly be compared to traditions which were once an integral part of rural life. "One should study the reasons why the inhabitants of the poor areas of Cairo do not decorate their houses like they do in the country," says Shafiq. One reason may well be that rural immigrants have been deprived of essential feelings of security, working more often than not on a day-to-day basis and living in extremely *harsh conditions with the threat of eviction and destitution con*stantly looming overhead. It is in this context that the artists' effort should be viewed. Abla proudly points out the lamp-posts along Salah Salem, the road splitting the potters' area into two. *Before the artists began their work, he recounts, the road was* plunged into pitch darkness come nightfall. Accidents were frequent: several times, children who tried to pick their way down the slope that the houses overlook, tripped in the dark and tumbled down, almost three metres, to the road below. Now Salah Salem is lined by lamp-posts— and Abla hopes that the murals will draw the municipality's attention to the rest of the community's pressing needs. Abla, it would seem, views the process less in terms of beautification than of empowerment. He encouraged his neighbours in Kom El-Ghorab to pay a visit to the municipal authorities, and a delegation was accordingly formed. The community's demands were clearly formulated and persuasively presented and, although they have not yet been met, as far as Abla is concerned the fact that the inhabitants took matters into *their own hands and approached the authorities is a step in itself.* It is in this context, perhaps, that the wall paintings should be seen. More than an expression of artistic talent, the experiment may be understood as a graphic call for help.

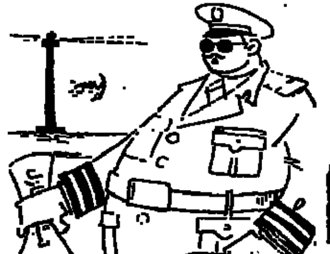
Nasser's cartoon comeback













To commemorate Nasser's birthday, cartoonist Mohamed Hamouda wiped the dust off a long forgotten series that tells the life story of the Egyptian leader. **Dina Ezzat** peruses the collection

Since he passed away in 1970, late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser has been the subject of a mountain of political and historic publications. His public and personal life, his role in the 1952 Revolution and his tenure as Egypt's president have been the subject of many cinema and television productions.

This year, in commemoration of Nasser's 79th birthday, cartoonist Mohamed Hamouda decided to dig up a cartoon series he drew some two decades ago for children about the life of the late president. Hamouda's main aim, he said, is to underline the historical role Nasser played in shaping Egypt's modern history.

"This man was a great man," the artist said. "He did so much for his nation and the people loved him so much."

The cartoons comprise 32 drawings that recount the story of Nasser from the day he was born on 15 January 1918, to the day he passed away on 28 September 1970.

"I made this strip in the early 1970s to show it to children who frequented the country's cultural centres," Hamouda explained. At that time, he was working at the Cairo Cultural Centre and his cartoons were always given prominence on the agenda because of their popularity. But his Nasser collection was not very welcome at the time: "I did not even get to screen them," Hamouda recalled.

The cartoons start with a set of drawings that depict the village where Nasser's family lived. The story moves from there to the early years of Nasser's life, chronicling his growing hatred of colonisation and his leadership during the 1952 Revolution. The agrarian reform policy, industrialisation, the construction of the *High Dam*, and the nationalisation of the Suez Canal also feature in simple and light-hearted drawings. Other memorable political happenings featured include the wars of 1956 and 1967, as well as Egypt's support of the liberation movement in Third World countries and the country's participation in the Non-Aligned Movement. The last couple of drawings are about Nasser's death.

"It took me about six months to complete this collection. I wanted to make sure that I was telling the story of someone as great as Nasser in a way that the children could understand," Hamouda said.

Several of the cartoonist's drawings do not feature Nasser himself. One example is the drawing that shows the attention given by the state to education and industrialisation. "This was deliberate," Hamouda explained. "*I wanted to tell children that al*though Nasser is gone, the things he did for Egypt and the Egyptians are still there."

The cartoonist now has his sights set on finding a publisher — preferably a "nationalist" one — to make his drawings into a book. Rather than money, Hamouda says his interest in this project is giving Nasser due recognition.

"This man served his country like no other. When he died, people cried for days and weeks, but I don't think he was ever given due recognition," he said. The artist advocates the construction of a museum dedicated to the late president.

Hamouda's interest in historical cartoons for children included more than his Nasser series. Throughout his four-decade long career, the cartoonist illustrated an unfailing interest in representing the *nation's most moving events to children in a sim*ple and easy to understand manner. He has told the story of the 6 October War and the infamous Israeli attacks on Bahr El-Baqar Primary School and the Abu Za'abal factory. More recent work depicts the tragedy of the earthquake victims.

In an attempt to establish a bond between children and their culture, Hamouda produced a collection of drawings of folk characters like juice vendors and fortune tellers.

Over the years, Hamouda's work has featured in magazines such as *Rose El-Youssef* and *Sabah El-Kheir*. Hamouda's drawings were also displayed in international contests, winning him several awards.

But it is the Nasser collection, Hamouda says, that is dearest to the artist.



Restoration of the fountain- school is underway (left) but the water problem has not yet been solved

photo: Magdi Abdel -Sayed

Focus on Bab Zuweila

Serious attempts to document and conserve medieval Islamic monuments is already underway. **Sherine Nasr** reports

The American Research Centre in Egypt (ARCE), in cooperation with the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), is now focusing its attention on the Bab Zuweila area of medieval Cairo. The project, made possible by a USAID grant, aims to document and conserve a number of adjacent historical buildings in Islamic Cairo.

"The project is based on the concept of area conservation, where select improvements to adjacent buildings reinforce each other, attract visitors as well as investors and ideally lead to a general upgrading of an entire area," said Robert Vincent, the project director. Among these monuments are Bab Zuweila, *Sabil-Kuttab* Nafisa El-Bayda, the Mosque of Saleh Tala'i and Zawiya-Sabil of Farag Ibn Barquq.

Conservation in the Sabil-Kuttab Nafisa El-Bayda, a rounded, two-storey building which lies just inside Bab Zuweila, is most advanced. Built in 1796, this *sabil-kuttab*, or "fountain-school," was founded by Nafisa El-Bayda, a remarkable woman who started life as a slave and later became the wife of Murad Bey, a Mameluke who was actively involved in preventing the French invasion.

Its architectural features are characteristic of the 18th century. "It is a typically Cairene building, because it is only in Cairo that *sabils* are combined with *kuttabs* — schools for teaching the Qur'an," said Vincent. He further explained that construction of *sabil-kuttabs* dates from the 13th century. It was only in the late Mameluke era that they were built as independent foundations on small, but prominent, sites throughout the city.

"Before conservation started, the building was in very poor condition," said Jaroslaw Dobrowolski, an architect. The staircase had collapsed and the failing sewage system in a neighbouring building caused permanent dampness in the walls. "It was fortunate that the people cooperated and we fixed their sewage pipes," he said.

Apart from the water problem, the *sabil-kuttab's* foundation was damaged from piles of garbage dumped next to the walls. The fact that the building is made of porous limestone aggravated this problem.

In an attempt to strengthen the building, workers removed the white marble floor, dug around the foundation and placed a layer of pebbles both inside and outside. "It was a solution to the water problem. Pebbles do not absorb water, and the building's lifespan will, thus, be prolonged," said Dobrowolski.

Ventilation pipes were also installed to absorb excess water vapour inside the building, and stainless steel rods were used to "stitch" the walls and make them stronger. "Meanwhile, workers are in the process of removing the disintegrated stones and replacing them with new ones," he explained.

A new roof has been constructed to protect the weakening original. "The old roof has been preserved and the new one has been made to support it," said Dobrowolski.

The water basins inside the *sabil-kuttab* were chemically treated and restored to their original ivory colour, as were many of the original stones which had turned black from time and neglect. ARCE has intentionally included Egyptian assistants from the SCA in their project. "It is our aim to train young Egyptians in modern conservation techniques because they will ultimately carry on the task once we have finished," said Dobrowolski.

The woodwork in the *sabil-kuttab* will be restored during a later phase of the project. "Later, the structure can serve as an exhibit where tourists and residents alike can learn about the ongoing restoration of Islamic Cairo," said Dobrowolski. Conservation of the *sabil-kuttab* is expected to be completed in 1998. "Then it can be used as a bookstore or a visitors' centre," he added.

The conservation of Bab Zuweila itself will begin next January. Constructed in 1092, this massive, fortified gate marks the southern entrance to the main north-south street of the walled city of El-Qahirah built by the Shi'ite Fatimids. "The forthcoming conservation phase aims at cleaning the gate, replacing some damaged stones and providing some structural support," said Mr Remsen, the technical director of the project. A review of the existing conditions and photographic documentation of the gates has already been completed.

Still in use today, the Mosque of Saleh Tala'i was the last major Fatimid mosque built in Cairo, and the only one built outside the walls of the city. It has a huge, open-air courtyard surrounded by 22 marble columns with Graeco-Roman capitals taken from pre-Islamic buildings that date to the second century AD. Its gate, adorned with geometrical designs, is a huge, brass replica of the original one housed in the Islamic Museum. Its minaret fell from over the entrance in the great earthquake of 1303.

The mosque's foundation is entirely submerged. "If the water problem is not solved, there is no point in restoring the mosque because it will be destroyed again," said Remsen.

A feasibility study of the problems associated with waste water has been conducted to determine possible solutions. A 250-metre new sewage line, to replace the currently overloaded one, is being considered. Meanwhile, only limited intervention is recommended. "We will soon fix the roof because it is leaking and restore the exquisite pulpit — the fourth oldest in Cairo," said Remsen.

"Conservation through infrastructure is the only way to drain water from the foundations of the adjacent historical monuments," said ARCE's Vincent.

Travellers in Egypt

The man who shot mummies

Some early travellers to Egypt came for health reasons. Jan Herman Insinger was one. **Lyla Pinch Brock** describes his experiences

Among the many foreigners who came to Egypt in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was 25-year-old Jan Herman Insinger, the son of a wealthy Dutch banking family who, in the words of his grandson, "...every day coughed up blood."

Insinger had contracted tuberculosis, a disease by no means uncommon in Europe and frequently fatal, from infected cows' milk. Young Jan was expected to live no more than five years, but he was strong in character, if not in health. His attitude was one of "...no retreat, no retreat, conquer or die." In 1879 his family put him on a boat to Alexandria, expecting never to see him again. Little did they know he would make a mockery of this prediction.

He stayed in Cairo for a while, and then moved to Luxor where the weather was better. Shortly, he had the good fortune to meet and marry a Lebanese woman. Her father, observing young Jan's pallid features, assumed his daughter would soon be a well-off widow, and immediately acquiesced to his proposal. That they had four children — three girls and a boy — attested to his increasing vigour.

Egypt in the late 19th century was a land of opportunity for Europeans, especially those interested in the antiquities trade. "Collecting" was a popular pastime, and many members of the foreign community were engaged in acquiring objects and selling them abroad.

Despite the formation of a government department to protect the monuments, it was commonplace for large fragments of Egypt's heritage to escape the country unheeded. Insinger was later to have a "row" with Howard Carter, accusing him of giving tacit approval to smuggle objects out of Egypt; and Flinders Petrie, when turning over the finds from his excavations in Amarna, Kahun and Abydos, was heard to mutter that he brought them in through the museum's front door only to see them go out the back.

Young Insinger was introduced into this atmosphere — an atmosphere even more highly-charged in Luxor. The Valley of the Kings was being explored for the first time as well as the area around Hatshepsut's temple at Deir El-Bahri, where surprising discoveries were being made.

The English controlled the government and the French the Antiquities Service. Many archaeological dilettantes attached themselves to officials for the chance of a first-hand glimpse at an exciting discovery.

Insinger had an instant entrée due to his fluent French and because he had taken up photography as a hobby. This latter was not to be taken lightly. Photography was fast becoming recognised as a valuable method of recording in archaeology. Until the 1920s, cameras were still uncommon on excavations, much to the chagrin of modern scholars who still puzzle over events that were never photographed. In the case of Insinger, his "hobby" was to net him a prize beyond worth, but meanwhile, it won him the close acquaintance of Gaston Maspero, director of the Egyptian Museum, then in Bulaq.



Tuberculosis was slow to erode the young Dutchman's health. He took to riding out into the desert, learned to speak Arabic and became a fixture in Egyptian villages. The diary he left behind (now in Leiden) contained many colourful stories about his Egyptian neighbours and their customs.

"He was full of praise for the Egyptians," recalled his grandson, "They gave him the name 'Abu Shanab' because of his flowing mustaches." Sometimes, however, his desert adventures took a bad turn: one night his tent blew away, and another time, he was set upon by thieves.

When his health permitted, he dabbled in the family banking business. With his knowledge of Arabic he began to acquire objects for Dutch museums and was able to negotiate the purchase of an extremely valuable demotic papyrus — now called "Papyrus Insinger" — for Leiden Museum. He managed to reduce the price, over days of negotiating, to 2,000 guilders. Maspero himself sold Insinger two mummies, assuring him that he could provide him with others as a special favour.

During his years in Egypt, Insinger travelled from Dongold in the Sudan up to Damietta in the Delta, happily shooting all the way. These photographs now form an important part of the collection of the State Museum of Antiquities in Leiden, and span the years from 1880 to 1888. "The monuments were rapidly disappearing during those years," he wrote to C Leemans, director of the museum in Leiden. This fact made his record priceless; doubly so because he focused on the historic and the unique. "During all my years spent in Egypt," he said, "I have been aiming my photographic objective on inscriptions... in many places where nobody else did so."

Perhaps his greatest photographic opportunity came in 1881, when the astounding Deir El-Bahri mummy cache was found. Maspero was in Paris, so it was left to his assistant, Emile Brugsch, to respond to a confession by one of the Abd El-Rassul brothers of systematically looting a cache of antiquities over ten years. Brugsch took quick action. He crossed the Nile in the dead of night and followed his informer along a little-known track to a spot where a black hole gaped in the cliffs. Brugsch bravely allowed himself to be lowered down, and at the bottom found himself in a room where "... every inch... was covered with coffins and antiquities of all kinds."

These were the bodies and funerary equipment of the pharaohs of Egypt who had been removed from their tombs for safekeeping by the priests of the 21st Dynasty. Fearing reprisals, Brugsch had all the objects moved to the service's boat and on to Cairo within a few days. Yet before Maspero returned, he had managed to unwrap two of the royal mummies and was peddling pieces of their linen.

The excitement surrounding the discovery was overwhelming. Everyone wanted to see the royal mummies, but Maspero only allowed in a select few. Insinger with his trusty camera became the only foreigner given written permission to photograph the faces of the Pharaohs as they were carefully unwrapped.

This was the highlight of a life lived to the fullest. He confessed, "I am condemned to die, but nobody's told me when, so I guess I can force a decision in my own favour." He passed away in 1918, at the age of 64, after living most of his life in Egypt. He became a collector and his children, according to his grandson, inherited "mummies and masks". His body was placed in a tomb of his own design, one that is unmistakably Islamic. It was, he said, "...to show his gratitude for the way the Egyptians received this foreigner..."

Priorities for '97

Tourism development, including increasing the number of tourists, hotel rooms and Internet access, is among the Ministry of Tourism's priorities in 1997. **Rehab Saad** reports

According to tourism officials, tourism development tops the Ministry of Tourism's list of priorities for 1997. "It lies at the core of any comprehensive plan for Egypt," said Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui.

He added that in order to encourage developers, it is necessary to purify and develop legislation governing investment and to get rid of all obstacles facing investors.

"In 1997, Egypt will be ready to receive significantly more tourists than last year," El-Beltagui said. "In 1996, Egypt received 3.8 million tourists, and we will be working hard to reach our goal of 4.2 million in 1997. A special plan has been set up to increase the number of tourist nights from 26 to 29 million this year."

The number of hotel rooms will also be increased by 7,300, so that the total hotel capacity in 1997 will be 75,000 rooms. This will provide approximately 175,000 new job opportunities.

To achieve these goals, the Ministry of Tourism will concentrate on pursuing its marketing campaigns abroad, opening new markets, making use of new technology concerning tourist information and upgrading the quality of tourist products and services.

It is worth mentioning that in 1996, the Ministry of Tourism's marketing and advertising campaigns were directed toward France, Russia, other Arab countries, Germany, Italy, England and Japan. "Now committees have been formed to study some of the new markets and carry out promotional campaigns in such areas as Malaysia, Scandinavia and South Korea," Beltagui said. More tourist brochures will be printed to cover the needs of the targeted markets.

"In 1996, we printed seven brochures written in seven different languages. We are now preparing brochures in another 12 languages, including Russian, Hungarian, Polish, Turkish, Swedish, Finnish, Norwegian and Danish. Two new reports will also be issued by the ministry on medical/rehabilitative tourism and tourism for women," Beltagui said.

Marketing Egypt on the Internet, which is accessed by more than 100 million people all over the world, is the ministry's top priority for 1997. An agreement with an American company to create approximately 2,000 pages on Egypt and its tourist attractions online is already in the works.

What's on?

Ramadan deals

Semiramis Inter-continental
Oriental delicacies will be provided for Iftar at the Felucca Brasserie and Spaghetteria restaurants. Kheimet El-Fawanees, in the Cleopatra ballroom, will provide Sohour and late night oriental shows with a group of famous Egyptian stars. Minimum charge for Sohour is LE40 except Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays when the minimum charge is LE50. The Night & Day is also open for 24 hours providing a rich cuisine. The Grill restaurant offers sophisticated French dining from 7pm, while Los Amigos features Mexican cuisine and live entertainment daily from 6pm.

Mövenpick Heliopolis
Iftar and Sohour are being served daily at the Orangerie restaurant. For entertainment after Iftar, the Dawwar provides sheesha, backgammon and oriental drinks and food.

Special halls have been prepared to receive private Iftar and Sohour gatherings.

Special accommodation prices are offered during the holy month of Ramadan for Egyptians and foreign residents. LE270 for a single or double room and LE330 for a room overlooking the garden and swimming pool. The rates include service charge and taxes.

Day use is available from 9am to 3pm. Garden rooms are LE180 while regular rooms are LE150. Rooms can be used by up to four persons.

Al-Salam Swissotel
An Iftar buffet will be served in the Samara restaurant — selections will be changed daily. The Kheima of Ya Salam will be opened daily to guests for Sohour, entertainment, singing and sheesha.

Nile Hilton
Iftar and Sohour will be served daily at the Ibis Cafe, Abu Ali oriental cafe and Gawhrat El-Nil. The prices of the Iftar buffets range from LE54 to LE70 plus service charge, sales tax and the government tax. The buffets include oriental delicacies, soups and desserts. For entertainment, the Abu Ali Cafe is open daily from 7pm to 3am.

Pyramids Park Hotel
Iftar is being served at the Sultan restaurant for LE55, including all taxes. The Bein El-Qasrein tent, next to the Sultan restaurant, is open for Sohour from 6pm to 2am daily. A la carte Souhour items, hot and cold beverages and sheesha are also available at regular prices with no minimum charge.

Sonesta Hotels
Special prices are offered by Sonesta hotels for Egyptians and foreign residents during the month of Ramadan:
Sonesta Hotel Cairo. LE96 per person per night in a double room, including buffet breakfast, service charge and tax.
Sonesta Nile Cruises. $280 for 5 days/4 nights per person in a double cabin including full board and sightseeing.
Sonesta Beach Resort, Hurghada. LE133 per person per night in a double room based on a half board accommodation and including service charge and taxes.
Ambassador Club. LE105 per person per night in a double room based on half board accommodation and including service charge and taxes.
Sonesta Paradisio, El-Gouna. LE140 per person per night in a double room based on half board accommodation and including service charge and taxes.
Sonesta, Port Said. LE114 per person per night in a double room including buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes.
Sonesta Beach Resort, Sharm El-Sheikh. LE150 per person per night in a double room including buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**

The London three

The British players must have wanted to go home, lock the door, crawl under the bed and pretend that nobody was home at the conclusion of the British Junior Squash Open. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports

For the first time in a long time the final of the British Junior Open — the second most important championship after the World Championship — was purely an Egyptian affair this year. Egypt's junior champion and world junior champion Ahmed Faizy defeated his fellow countryman, 17-year-old Amr Shabana in the final of the British Junior Open 3-1. With Faizy in first place, and Shabana in second, Egypt's Karim El-Mistikawi rounded out the troika by nicking third place from Britain's junior champion John Russell.

The triumph marks the second time Faizy has won the British Junior Open, and the sixth time in his age category since 1992. His achievement is unprecedented in Egyptian squash annals — Ahmed Barada, world-ranked seven, has only won the British Junior Open three times. Last year, after fulfilling his dream of succeeding Barada as the world's top junior player, Faizy took a hiatus from the sport to concentrate on his studies at AUC. While it no doubt helped him academically, the break set him back two notches in his world ranking to 33. Faizy was, again, planning to give the British Junior Open a miss this year for the benefit of his education. But Egyptian Squash Federation officials and his coaches encouraged him to juggle his exams and not miss a golden opportunity to prove himself. And so, although Faizy had to come back to Egypt to sit for examination during the championship, he still managed to outdo his opponents. In the quarterfinal, he bested Switzerland's Mark Eidenberg 3-2. On court in the semifinal, he squashed his compatriot Karim El-Mistikawi 3-2, and in the final he played and easily defeated Amr Shabana 3-1.

After years of being a satellite to Ahmed Barada's planet — they were both on the squad that won the World Junior Championship back in 1994 — Faizy now hopes to reach the world top ten like his old team-mate.

Amr Shabana, meanwhile, came through all his matches as spotless as Queen Elizabeth's linen, despite the strong contenders he was up against from the draw. The up-and-comer defeated France's Stefan Galifi 3-0 in the quarterfinal, and bested England's top seeded John Russell 3-1 in the semifinal.

Shabana's performance, which has improved greatly since last year, is a strong indication that Egypt just may have a champion to follow in the footsteps of Barada and Faizy. The talented young player is a British Open veteran, having made his debut at the age of 13 years. His encounter with Faizy in the final this year had a sense of déjà vu for fans. Both players met in the final of the under-14 category in the tournament four years ago and again in the final of the under-16 year's category in 1995. Shabana was also on the second place winning Egyptian team in the World Junior Squash Championship last July. Since many analysts consider the British Junior Open as the bellwether of the outcome of the World Junior Championship, Shabana is likely to be Egypt's prime defender in its bid for a third consecutive title win.



photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

One sip, one puff, one move, that's all

Chess and grumpy old men

Throughout the holy month of Ramadan the old and young come together for a good old game of chess. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** checks out the café sports scene

One would expect the sight of an elderly man and a teenager together — by choice — to be as rare an occurrence as the reappearance of Haley's comet on its 76 year cycle. But with a *sheesha* and coffee at hand and a chess board on the table, it is a scene you are likely to encounter at *ahwas*, or coffee houses throughout Cairo and indeed, with varying local colour, the world over.

Noisy, crowded, but always relaxing, the *ahwa*, the connoisseurs know, is the ideal place to find a pick-up game or meet friends for a session of chess. It is also the place where the timeless tradition of one generation passing knowledge and experience on to the next is carried out.

While many people, world-wide, enjoy a good old game of *domina* or *tawla*, the discriminating chess player would never condescend to stoop so low as to play a game of mere chance. Chess, the game of kings and the common man, on the other hand, is a contest of cunning and skill where the best man always wins. "If you start a chess game, you lose awareness of time and all those who surround you," said Mohamed Kamal, a taxi driver, "Even the noise of those who play games of luck like *domina* and *tawla*, whom, I might add, I look down upon as trivial people, we don't feel them. We have our air. It's unique. It's something mental. It's chess."

A coffee house isn't always just a place where people gather to order a coffee 'and make it well' or 'one tea in the fifty'. Throughout the Middle East, Asia, Europe and the United States all the famous international chess players, even the Russian World Champion Anatoly Karpov, have learned the intricacies of the game in coffee houses that have a tradition of continuing the art of chess.

In Cairo and especially during Ramadan, when working hours are shortened, the players come out at night to pit their skills and while away the hours in such coffee houses among friends, old and new. Kushtomor in Bab El-Shaariya, El-Horreya in Bab El-Louk, and Zahrit El-Midan in El-Sayeda Zeinab are Cairo's three most famous *ahwas* where chess is played. And, chess, played in these places, often turns into a spectator sport as mini-leagues — which may draw out for days — are organised and the patrons loyally root for their favourite players.

"I finish my work early," said Mohamed Abdel-Haq, a government employee, "and after *Iftar* and praying *El-Tarawih Gamaa* (long collective prayers performed during Ramadan) I gather my friends to sit together in an *ahwa* to play chess, *domina* and *tawla*."

"We can't meet in a club," added his friend Mukhtar Abdel-Moneim, "because it's not a common place for all of us. Moreover an *ahwa* is cheap and you feel at home. You can speak loudly, play chess, make big circles to cheer each other or even sing."

According to Brigadier Younis Awad, manager of the Egyptian Chess Federation, the best players are to be found in coffee houses. "Most of the famous Egyptian players don't belong to a club," Awad said, "The only way for them to allow their talent to flourish and to get recognised as national and international players is the chess *ahwa*." Awad himself learned the game in an *ahwa* and nowadays patronises them to find the best unknown players.

Still not all are enamoured with playing chess in coffee houses. "We learned to love the game and the old generation who taught us the ABCs of chess in the *ahwas*," said Al-Hareth Mohamed Ali, an international chess player, "But, while at the beginning of our chess education we felt the importance of the *ahwa*, later we became disenchanted, especially when we deduced that the essence of chess is concentration — a thing that an *ahwa* doesn't always facilitate."

However, another player, Munir Moaz, added, "In Ramadan, it's another case. We enjoy playing chess in *ahwas*. Throughout the year we work and we can't fix regular times to meet friends and play together, but in Ramadan it's the occasion. Just as we learnt the game it's the time to teach the new generation the basics. Moreover we enjoy the company. Once a chess player, especially in an *ahwa*, always a chess player anywhere... that's the rule."

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**


photo: Randa Shaath

Georges Kazazian: Batman

He and the band will play after midnight — long, long after

The pressure of a hand in the middle of the dank, dark night — you know there's a friend who understands, some friend, some small assurance that there might be the courtesy of a better tomorrow. Well — is his music any good? It's affectionate, and a little goes a long way, so grab it if it fits.

Silence.

Who are you? North or South?

And it's over, the music part. That's it, that's Kazazian. Like conversation around midnight, it sticks around for a few dots and dashes, and goes. And the reassuring friend — gone too. The flitter-mouse has slipped off, under a bus, and he comes out safely the other side — with a gorgeous head of thick black hair.

Georges Kazazian was born in Cairo 43 years ago, of Armenian immigrant parents, so he is Egyptian in the same way as Callas, American born, was Greek. A batman on the move, but genuinely part of a super-metropolis. He fits Cairo. Whether Cairo cares or not is the privilege of city monsters. His youth was a hard time. The family had little money and Cairo is a rich city, so they were poor. Everything fitted a turbulent youth.

'K' for short: his aberrations of character impeded a direct route to the city's piles of gold. And behind this world of reality, mother and father wanted more for their son — doctor, engineer, or at least a plump, gold-plated businessman, pin-striped suit, red tie and solid gold Rolex. After education at La Salle Dominican College, he seems to have taken off on an extended voyage which takes more than a Baedecker to unravel. Best to stick to signs and facts en route.

His family life forbade any approach to music. He, by chance, found musical instruments which appealed instantly to him, especially old Egyptian ones. He became an obsessive collector. He knew no musical theory at all, but learned the rudiments without any instruction, playing the *mizmar* (oboe) and the *rababa* (violin). From earliest times he found the so-called 'popular' Egyptian instruments extremely sophisticated, loved their tones, turning them into highly personal colours, not exactly Egyptian, not Western, but pure Bat.

This animal, the bat, has a sound mechanism profoundly sensitised and accurate. Its hearing faculties still defy science. It hears fruits and flowers and ripe orchards of plums ready for eating. It hears mosquitoes and is terrified, yet is indifferent to the roar of city buses and shotguns at close range. It seems to hear movement itself. Kazazian fits into this audio dimension.

Sabil, formed in 1991 as his six-piece band, is the essence of movement. When young, Kazazian was turbulent. He became a manipulator of the midnight flit. It took him to Luxor, to England and France. Much of his musical listening was done in London's Fulham and Kings roads in their great days — the 1970s. Yet his knowledge of what used to be called contemporary or even post-modern music is limited.

In the early Cairo days, he got around. He sang in clubs to his own accompaniment, often tunes of his own composition. In talking, he has innate word response and it is a delight to hear a composer who says: "Words first, then the noise". Like Verdi. He sang, he dishwashed in restaurants. He talked himself in and out of compromising situations, and with Armenian relish is a torch song-teller of high tales out of everywhere. Africa, the Rive Gauche, Soho, after hours, Foragin, listening, evaluating the unwritten book of notes and conclusions of his life. He says all this detritus belongs in his music.

He has come to terms with what they call his musical illiteracy. He reads music, he says, but slowly. He hears everything with instantaneous response, except the hands that even now have not learned musical notation. But in 1996, is this necessary? Cage, Xenakis, Ligeit and the like make notation look like pointillist paintings. It is up to the interpretive genius to unravel them. Take your PhD in turning Monet's *Waterlilly* into signs a student can read as print on a page.

Kazazian has learned the hard way about musical life. It is a smoke-screen of delusion and its practitioners, a species of magician who speak right and play a language of their own, far out of reach of most ordinary people. Then the sounds come, the music and it is all in the same sea, floating along like a Venetian canal, on its way to the open sea. Beethoven goes with the Beatles, pop will drown the lot if you don't manipulate the currents.

Kazazian has gone from youth to age 43. He rarely mentions individuals in conversation. Not interested in politics, he is far out, with hands firmly on the direction of his own anonymity. An expert at the veiled Gioconda get-out. A gentle smile, and he has done with that part of his life.

His presence is full of surprises and projects. He is more interesting to look at than to listen to, except for the music waiting in the background. "It's not how you start, it's how you end." That will be enough, he says, so there he is.

A model of athletic pragmatism, handsome and very lovable. He mixes dates, happenings, everything floats about like in a film. He's not stuck-up, and his dignity always remains — detached and busily interested in what's new in the doing. His eyes dart, he darts, everything about him darts very swiftly. There is steel in the clear eyes and, if he were ever under fire, he would stand rock firm. He's like a St Anthony of El Greco, live and apparently high-mannered, but with an aura of the streets — St Anthony was the patron saint of the voyager.

He's like Visconti character, or better, a man out of Balzac, Raymonde de Rubempre, darting through the alleys of Cairo and Paris on business of God or the devil — the splendours and miseries of big-city archangels with bullets and masterpieces in their coat pockets. He makes a joke about drawing an axe from behind him to strike out an interloper, but the axe falls from his hand, the music begins and Sabil plays. Suddenly, everything fits into place. Georges Kazazian changes into a new mirage — himself. How it all came about, the music which says all of him is really his only story, not a lifeline of dates and times which are forgotten before they hit the page. The young man, unread musical, now has a life pattern of his own. He is unique. His late nights are all dawns. He is the unlucky one whose negative happenings all turn out positive, the survivor of a lucky life. He travels light with what bits and pieces of the theft of a lifetime have left *him*, and it all shows in the wandering serpentine lines of the music. A strange destiny.

He has appealed to Shadi Abdel-Salam, to Mo'min Semeihi and Hassan El-Gretli in film and theatre. He begins to release cassettes in France, which are unobtainable here. He gives concerts at El-Hanager and the AUC. He has an audience, but the scenes are changing, even for batman. What the music academies call him? Musically illiterate; a bore; repetitious; an entrepreneur of other people's talents; New Guinea mountain music. As already said, he's steely under fire, he smiles. And there are those who find him more Egyptian than any other composer. What is Egyptian anyway? Is it the ensemble sound of Kulthoum *with* voice or Abdel-Wahab *without* voice. There are no tangos in Kazazian's music. He is his own legend and melody without any ersatz Western noises. Influence is an honest criticism, classical Indian passes through his friezes, and Turkish too.

Things are shrinking, media and computer are tightening the whole aspect of music and its performance. The old classical formulas are collapsing. Kazazian's interest is almost encapsulated in Egyptian instruments. He aims to create modern copies of these from the middle ages, enlarge his group of six to sixteen, making a sound that probably resembles what Mozart heard in the 18th century, the beginning of Orientalism. He has one important thing which no other Egyptian composer has — the big city sound. Using instruments and not electronic mixers, he brings Cairo street sounds to life. He seems to come from beneath the traffic, where certainly no one has ventured before. Maybe buses sing like bats do, and batman writes the tunes. They say you can find anything in Cairo, so Kazazian has found music from outside the academies. Like Selsi and Nancarow, he goes where no one went before and without support. No one helps you over a black hole, he says, you either fall in and disappear forever, or cross over it on your own machinery.

Kazazian has come so far, where next? The green mountains of New Guinea may discover him, Cairo can encourage him. He has an audience, but limited. The music is another thing, a sort of see-through body stocking — alternative, alliterative, horizontal, incomprehensible, unintelligent but instinctive, cartographical, the last E-flat major nocturne which got run over by the bus on the way to the pyramids.

Go mad, go listen, out there, to the raw meat music as the bat empire takes over at a gala party. Gala used to mean a good time, so take the music, it's irresistible.

Profile by **David Blake**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

♥ Here we are dears, once more well into the holy month of Ramadan. As you well know, fasting compels one to place mind over matter, for a little while at least, so what better time than this to exercise the darling little grey cells? And let me tell you, there are plenty of opportunities these days to provide them with oxygen. Al-Ahram Organisation, for starters, aware of this need, scheduled the award ceremony of Al-Ahram Book Club during the holy month. You know, of course, that Al-Ahram Book Club is a very serious affair, whose members can only be university professors, distinguished scientists and generally *la crème de la crème* among thinkers and intellectuals.

For the past 12 years, they have taken it upon themselves to encourage science by printing scientific books and distinguishing the best of them with a much- coveted award. Over the years, needless to tell you, many a little scientific *precis* of mine — under various *noms de plume*, of course — has found its way onto their short list. No matter, you know how I hate to boast... one has to leave something to the less scientifically gifted... although the way my good friend **Hani Tolba**, head of Al-Ahram agency for distribution, described the criteria of selection, I feel they inspired themselves strongly from one or two little things I produced recently: the first criterion is the value of the research, the second, its contribution to the promotion of scientific research. Isn't that exactly what I usually do, dears, whenever I care to put pen to paper? Anyway, among the 20 entries presented, 10 were selected and received prizes at the award-giving ceremony presided over by Chairman of Al-Ahram Organisation **Ibrahim Nafie**. Two titles attracted my attention: *Trilogy of Architectural Creativity* and *Cardiology*, the latter a heavy tome for post graduate medical students. How could these compete in originality and advancement of scientific thought with my *Mating Habits of the Upper-Mongolian Snail*? A good thing I have been withholding its publication, else how could I have regaled my dinner companions with choice pickings from this fine work, judiciously placed in post-prandial conversations? Be warned, though, dears: my findings are not for the faint-hearted among you.


photo: Ayman Barayz


photo: Amr Gamal

photo: Sherif Sonbol

Top: Nafie at the award ceremony of Al-Ahram Science Book Club; and at the exhibition of Islamic art

Bottom: The Beiram El-Tonsi café

♠ Al-Ahram Organisation is not only on the front line of scientific discovery. Art in all its ramifications is well taken care of. Actually, Al-Ahram has one of the most impressive private art collections in Egypt, items of which are on permanent display in various parts of Al-Ahram's buildings. The lobby itself is the venue for countless exhibitions at which all the plastic arts are represented. Why, only last week, **Ibrahim Nafie** was hosting a special exhibition celebrating the customs of Egyptians during Ramadan. The paintings were so original and so numerous that I shall not venture to list them just in case I forget someone. I can see some of my so called "friends", whom I shall not name, pursing their mouths and hissing about my proverbial jealousy. None of it is true dears: I always give credit where credit is due. It is really not my fault that it is usually due to me. As I was saying, these Ramadan scenes were so inspiring that I decided to spend the rest of the evening drinking mint tea at El-Hussein.

♣ I was so nostalgic for one of those authentic Ramadan nights that, when I heard that my good friend and renowned satirist **Mahmoud El-Saadani** was holding court at the Journalists' Club in Giza, I decided to surprise him by joining him under the traditional tent. I thought it only proper to match his *abaya*, *caftan* and traditional *taqiya* with my silver brocade *galabiya* and assorted accessories, including my one-thousand-pearl, hand-embroidered slippers. He was duly dazzled by my apparition, I assure you, but, ever the gentleman, he took only one short second to gulp, then quickly introduced me to artist **Hussein El-Sharqawi**, who has come from London to paint a truly splendid mural representing the Beiram El-Tonsi café, complete with the celebrities who used to frequent it. Dear **Mahmoud** insisted on pointing out all the artists, writers, painters and musicians whose names are shining stars in the history of modern Egypt: Naguib Mahfouz, Tawfiq El-Hakim, Amina El-Said, Taha Hussein, Ahmed Shawqi, Ihsan Abdel-Qoddous, Rose El-Youssef, Youssef Idriss, Louis Awad, Ahmed Bahaaeddin, Naguib El-Rehani, Fikri Abaza, Mohamed Abdel-Wahab, Shekoukou and Ali El-Kassar, the last two serving the customers their tea and *shishas*. Umm Kulthum and Mary Mounib look on, each at her *mashrabiya*-adorned window. They are all listening to composer Mahmoud El-Sherif. In the background are traditional *haras* filled with little shops, vendors of traditional wares and their clients.

Mahmoud, who is chairman of the club board, told me that he had asked **Sharqawi** to come all the way from London to complete the mural before Ramadan. And what a good idea it was. Almost as good as the ones I usually have myself, don't you think? Everyone is going to see the mural and on the various occasions where I graced the tent with my presence I observed **Farouk Hosni**, our minister of culture, and **Ismail Sallam**, our minister of health, among others, being given a guided tour by **Mahmoud** and **Mohamed Saqr**, the club director.

